OCTOBER

Weird Tales

25¢

Tiger Cat

By DAVID H. KELLER

Seabury Quinn

Edmond Hamilton

H. P. Lovecraft

A MAGAZINE OF THE BIZARRE AND UNUSUAL

Weird Tales

REGISTERED IN U.S. PATENT OFFICE

Volume 30 | CONTENTS FOR OCTOBER, 1937 | Number 4

Cover Design . . . . . M. Brundage
Illustrating a scene in "Tiger Cat"

Tiger Cat . . . . . David H. Keller 386
A story as fascinating as any of the horrors conceived in the tortured mind of Dante or of Poe

Pledged to the Dead . . . . . Seabury Quinn 397
A thrilling tale of a lover whose sweetheart had been in her grave more than a century

Which Will Scarcely Be Understood . . . . . Robert E. Howard 416
Verse

The Shunned House . . . . . H. P. Lovecraft 418
A posthumous story of a revolting horror in the cellar of an old house

The Homicidal Diary . . . . . Earl Peirce, Jr. 437
What strange compulsion drove this man to roam the streets and commit his ghastly crimes?

The Long Arm . . . . . Franz Habl 450
Insidiously crawling and groping, the long arm reached out on its errand of death

The Lake of Life (part 2) . . . . . Edmond Hamilton 459
A weird-scientific serial replete with thrills, adventure, mystery and romance

The Golgotha Dancers . . . . . Manly Wade Wellman 483
A curious and terrifying story about an artist who sold his soul to paint a living picture

Here Lies . . . . . H. W. Guernsey 489
An ironic tale about a practical communist who taught his friend when to take him seriously

The Last of Mrs. DeBrugh . . . . . H. Sivia 492
DeBrugh was dead, but he still regarded his promise as a sacred duty to be fulfilled

To a Skull on My Bookshelf . . . . . Elizabeth Virgins Raplee 495
Verse

Weird Story Reprint:

The Purple Cincture . . . . . H. Thompson Rich 496
A popular story from an early number of WEIRD TALES

After Two Nights of the Ear-ache . . . . . Francis Hard 502
Verse

The Eyrie 503
A department in which the readers express their opinions

Published monthly by the Popular Fiction Publishing Company, 2427 East Washington Street, Indianapolis, Ind. Entered as second-class matter March 20, 1925, at the post office at Indianapolis, Ind., under the act of March 3, 1879. Single copies, 25 cents. *Subscription rates:* One year in the United States and possessions, Cuba, Mexico, South America, Spain, $2.50; Canada, $2.75; elsewhere, $3.00. English office: Otis A. Kline, c/o John Paradise, 86 Strand, W. C. 2, London. The publishers are not responsible for the loss of unsolicited manuscripts, although every care will be taken of such material while in their possession. The contents of this magazine are fully protected by copyright and must not be reproduced either wholly or in part without permission from the publishers.

NOTE—All manuscripts and communications should be addressed to the publishers' Chicago office at 840 North Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Ill.

FARNSWORTH WRIGHT, Editor.

Copyright 1937, by the Popular Fiction Publishing Company.

COPYRIGHTED IN GREAT BRITAIN

WEIRD TALES ISSUED 1st OF EACH MONTH

Tiger Cat

By DAVID H. KELLER

A grim tale of torture, and the blind men who were chained to pillars in an underground cave

THE man tried his best to sell me the house. He was confident that I would like it. Repeatedly he called my attention to the view.

There was something in what he said about the view. The villa on the top of a mountain commanded a vision of the valley, vine-clad and cottage-studded. It was an irregular bowl of green, dotted with stone houses which were white-washed to almost painful brilliancy.

The valley was three and a third miles at its greatest width. Standing at the front door of the house, an expert marksman with telescopic sight could have placed a rifle bullet in each of the white marks of cottages. They nestled like little pearls amid a sea of green grape-vines.

"A wonderful view, *Signor,*" the real-estate agent repeated. "That scene, at any time of the year, is worth twice what I am asking for the villa."

"But I can see all this without buying," I argued.

"Not without trespassing."

"But the place is old. It has no running water."

"Wrong!" and he smiled expansively, showing a row of gold-filled teeth. "Listen."

We were silent.

There came to us the sound of bubbling water. Turning, I traced the sound. I found a marble Cupid spurting water in a most peculiar way into a wall basin. I smiled and commented.

"There is one like that in Brussels and another in Madrid. But this is very fine. However, I referred to running water in a modern bathroom."

"But why bathe when you can sit here and enjoy the view?"

He was impossible. So, I wrote a check, took his bill of sale and became the owner of a mountain, topped by a stone house that seemed to be half ruin. But he did not know, and I did not tell him that I considered the fountain alone worth the price that I had paid. In fact, I had come to Italy to buy that fountain if I could; buy it and take it back to America with me. I knew all about that curious piece of marble. George Seabrook had written to me about it. Just one letter, and then he had gone on, goodness knows where. George was like that, always on the move. Now I owned the fountain and was already planning where I should place it in my New York home. Certainly not in the rose garden.

I sat down on a marble bench and looked down on the valley. The real-estate man was right. It was a delicate, delicious piece of scenery. The surrounding mountains were high enough to throw a constant shadow on some part of the valley except at high noon. There was no sign of life, but I was sure that the vineyards were alive with husbandmen and their families. An eagle floated serenely on the upper air currents, automatically adjusting himself to their constant changing.

Stretching myself, I gave one look at my car and then walked into the house.

IN THE kitchen two peasants sat, an old man and an old woman. They rose as I entered.

"Who are you?" I asked in English.

They simply smiled and waved their hands. I repeated my question in Italian.

"We serve," the man replied.

"Serve whom?"

"Whoever is the master."

"Have you been here long?"

"We have always been here. It is our home."

His statement amused me, and I commented, "The masters come and go, but you remain?"

"It seems so."

"Many masters?"

"Alas! yes. They come and go. Nice young men, like you, but they do not stay. They buy and look at the view, and eat with us a few days and then they are gone."

"And then the villa is sold again?"

The man shrugged. "How should we know? We simply serve."

"Then prepare me my dinner. And serve it outside, under the grapevine, where I can see the view."

The woman started to obey. The man came nearer.

"Looking eternally into the blackness of his life and chained to a pillar of stone."

"Shall I carry your bags to the bedroom?"

"Yes. And I will go with you and unpack."

He took me to a room on the second floor. There was a bed there and a very old chest of drawers. The floor, everything about the room was spotlessly clean. The walls had been freshly whitewashed. Their smooth whiteness suggested wonderful possibilities for despoliation, the drawing of a picture, the writing of a poem, the careless writhing autograph that caused my relatives so much despair.

"Have all the masters slept here?" I asked carelessly.

"All."

"Was there one by the name of George Seabrook?"

"I think so. But they come and go. I am old and forget."

"And all these masters, none of them ever wrote on the walls?"

"Of a certainty. All wrote with pencil what they desired to write. Who should say they should not? For did not the villa belong to them while they were here? But always we prepared for the new master, and made the walls clean and beautiful again."

"You were always sure that there would be a new master?"

"Certainly. Someone must pay us our wages."

I gravely placed a gold piece in his itching palm, asking, "What did they write on the walls?"

He looked at me with old, unblinking eyes. Owl eyes! That is what they were, and he slowly said,

"Each wrote or drew as his fancy led him, for they were the masters and could do as they wished."

"But what were the words?"

"I cannot speak English, or read it."

Evidently, the man was not going to talk. To me the entire situation was most interesting. Same servants, same villa, many masters. They came and bought and wrote on the wall and left, and then my real-estate friend sold the house again. A fine racket!

Downstairs, outdoors, under the grapevine, eating a good Italian meal, looking at the wonderful view, I came to laugh at my suspicions. I ate spaghetti, olives, dark bread and wine. Silence hung heavily over the sullen sleepy afternoon. The sky became copper-colored. It was about to rain. The old man came and showed me a place to put my car, a recess in the wall of the house, open at one end, but sheltered from the weather. The stone floor was black with grease; more than one automobile had been kept there.

"Other cars have been here," I ventured.

"All the masters had cars," the old man replied.

BACK on the stone gallery I waited for the storm to break. At last it came in a solid wall of gray wetness across the valley. Nearer and nearer it came till it deluged my villa and drove me inside.

The woman was lighting candles. I took one from her hand.

"I want to look through the house," I explained.

She made no protest; so I started exploring the first floor. One room was evidently the sleeping-quarters for the servants; another was the kitchen, and the remaining two might have served in the olds days for dining-room and drawing-room. There was little furniture, and the walls were gray with time and mold. One flight of stone stairs led upward to the bedroom, another to the cellar. I decided to go downstairs.

They were steps, not made of masonry, but apparently carved out of the living rock. The cellar was simply a cubical hole in the mountain. It all looked very

old. I had the uneasy feeling that originally that cellar had been a tomb and that later the house had been built over it. But, once at the bottom, there was nothing to indicate a sepulcher. A few small casks of wine, some junk, odds of rope and rusty iron, those were in the corners; otherwise, the room was empty, and dusty.

"It is an odd room," I commented to myself. It seemed in some way out of place and out of shape and size for the villa above it. I had expected something more, something larger, gloomier. Walking around, I examined the walls, and then something came to my alert senses.

Three sides of the room were carved out of rock, but the remaining side was of masonry, and in that side there was a door. A door! And why should a door be there except to lead to another room? There was a door, and that presupposed something on the other side. And what a door it was! More of a barricade than a partition. The iron hinges were built to support weight and give complete defense and support. There was a keyhole, and if the key corresponded with the size of the hole, it was the largest that I had ever heard of.

Naturally, I wanted to open the door. As master of the villa, I had a right to. Upstairs the old woman seemed unable to understand me and ended by telling me to see her husband. He, in turn, seemed incapable of following my stream of talk. At last, I took him to the door and pointed to the keyhole. In English, Italian and sign language I told him rather emphatically that I wanted the key to that door. At last he was willing to admit that he understood my questions. He shook his head. He had never had the key to that door. Yes, he knew that there was such a door, but he had never been on the other side. It was very old. Perhaps his ancestors understood about it, but they were all dead. He made me tired, so much so that I rested by placing a hand on the butt of the upper hinge. I knew that he was deceiving me. Lived there all his life and never saw the door open!

"And you have no key to that door?" I repeated.

"No. I have no key."

"Who has the key?"

"The owner of the house."

"But I own it."

"Yes, you are the master; but I mean the one who owns it all the time."

"So, the various masters do not really buy the place?"

"They buy it, but they come and go."

"But the owner keeps on selling it and owning it?"

"Yes."

"Must be a profitable business. And who owns it?"

"Donna Marchesi."

"I think I met her yesterday in Sorona."

"Yes, that is where she lives."

The storm had passed. Sorona was only two miles away, on the other side of the mountain. The cellar, the door, the mysterious uncertainty on the other side intrigued me. I told the man that I would be back by supper, and I went to my bedroom to change, preparatory to making an afternoon call.

In the room I found my hand black with oil.

And that told me a good many things, as it was the hand that had rested against the upper hinge of the door. I washed the hand, changed my clothes and drove my car to Sorona.

FORTUNATELY, the Donna Marchesi was at home. I might have met her before, but I now saw her ethereal beauty for the first time. A least, it seemed ethereal at the first moment. In some

ways she was the most beautiful woman that I had ever seen: skin white as milk, hair a tawny red, piled in great masses on her head, and eyes of a peculiar green, with pupils that were slots instead of circles. She wore her nails long, and they were tinted red to match the Titian of her hair. She seemed surprized to have me call on her, and more surprized to hear of my errand.

"You bought the villa?" she asked.

"Yes. Though, when I bought it, I did not know that you were the owner. The agent never stated whom he was acting for."

"I know," she said with a smile. "Franco is peculiar that way. He always pretends that he owns the place."

"No doubt he has used it more than once."

"I fear so. The place seems to be unfortunate. I sell it with a reserve clause. The owner must live there. And no one seems to want to stay; so the place reverts back to me."

"It seems to be an old place."

"Very old. It has been in my family for generations. I have tried to get rid of it, but what can I do when the young men will not stay?"

She shrugged her shoulders expressively. I countered with,

"Perhaps if they knew, as I do, that you owned the property, they would be content to stay, for ever, in Sorona."

"Prettily said," she answered. Then the room became silent, and I heard her heavy breathing, like the deep purr of a cat.

"They come and go," she said at last.

"And, when they go, you sell to another?" I asked.

"Naturally, and with the hope that one will stay."

"I have come for the key," I said bluntly, "the key to the cellar door."

"Are you sure you want it?"

"Absolutely! It is my villa and my cellar and my door. I want the key. I want to see what is on the other side of the door."

And then it was that I saw the pupils of her eyes narrow to livid slits. She looked at me for a second, for five, and then opening a drawer in a cabinet near her chair, she took out the key and handed it to me. It was a tool worthy of the door that it was supposed to open, being fully eight inches long and a pound in weight.

Taking it, I thanked her and said goodbye. Fifteen minutes later I was back, profuse in my apologies: I was temperamental, I explained, and I frequently changed my mind. Whatever was on the other side of the door could stay there, as far as I was concerned. Then again I kissed her hand farewell.

On the side street I passed through the door of a locksmith and waited while he completed a key. He was following a wax impression of the original key. An hour later I was on the way back to the villa, with the key in my pocket, a key that I was sure would unlock the door, and I was confident that the lady with the cat eyes felt sure that I had lost all interest in that door and what was beyond it.

The full moon was just appearing over the mountains when I drove my car up to the villa. I was tired, but happy. Taking the candlestick in my hand, which candlestick was handed to me with a deep bow by the old woman, I ascended the stairs to my bedroom. And soon I was fast asleep.

I AWOKE with a start. The moon was still shining. It was midnight. I heard, or thought I heard, a deep moaning. It sounded a little like waves beating on a rockbound coast. Then it ceased and was replaced by a musical element

that came in certain stately measures. Those sounds were in the room, but they came from far away; only by straining my sense of sound to the utmost could I hear anything.

Slippers on my feet, flashlight in my hand and the key in the pocket of my dressing-gown, I slowly descended the stairs. Loud snores from the servants' room told, or seemed to tell, of their deep slumbers. Down into the cellar I went and put the key into the hole of the lock. The key turned easily—no rust there—the springs and the tumblers had been well oiled, like the hinges. It was evident that the door had been used often. Turning the light on the hinges, I saw what had made my hand black with oil. Earnestly I damned the servants. They knew about the door. They knew what was on the other side!

Just as I was about to open the door I heard a woman's voice singing in Italian; it sounded like a selection from an opera. It was followed by applause, and then a moaning, and one shrill cry, as though someone had been hurt. There was no doubt now as to where the sounds that I heard in my room had come from; they had come from the other side of the door. There was a mystery there for me to solve. But I was not ready to solve it; so I turned the key noiselessly, and with the door locked, tiptoed back to my bed.

There I tried to put two and two together. They made five, seven, a million vague admixtures of impossible results, all filled with weird forebodings. But never did they make four, and till they did, I knew the answers to be wrong, for two and two had to make four.

Many changes of masters! One after another they came and bought and disappeared. A whitewashed wall. What secrets were covered with that whitewash? A door in a cellar. And what deviltry went on behind it? A key and a well-oiled lock, and servants that knew everything. In vain the question came to me. *What is back of the door?* There was no ready answer. But Donna Marchesi knew! Was it her voice that I had heard? She knew almost everything about it, but there was one thing that I knew and she did not. She did not know that I could pass through the door and find out what was on the other side. She did not know that I had a key.

The next day I pleaded indisposition and spent most of the hours idling and drowsing in my chamber. Not till nearly midnight did I venture down. The servants were certainly asleep that time. A dose of chloral in their wine had attended to the certainty of their slumbers. Fully dressed, with an automatic in my pocket, I reached the cellar and opened the door. It swung noiselessly on its well-greased hinges. The darkness on the other side was the blackness of hell. An indescribable odor came to me, a prison smell and with it the soft half sob, half laugh of sleeping children, dreaming in their sleep, and not happy.

I flashed the light around the room. It was not a room but a cavern, a cave that extended far into the distance, the roof supported by stone pillars, set at regular intervals. As far as my light would carry I saw the long rows of white columns.

And to each pillar was bound a man, by chains. They were resting on the stone floor, twenty or more of them, and all asleep. Snores, grunts and weary sighs came from them, but not a single eyelid opened. Even when I flashed the light in their faces their eyes were shut.

And those faces sickened me; white and drawn and filled with the lines of deep suffering. All were covered with scars; long, narrow, deep scars, some fresh and red, others old and dead-white. At last, the sunken eyelids and the inabil-

ity to see my flashlight and respond told me the nauseating truth. Those men were all blind.

A pleasant sight! One blind man, looking eternally into the blackness of his life, and chained to a pillar of stone—that was bad enough; but multiply that by twenty! Was it worse? Could it be worse? Could twenty men suffer more than one man? And then a thought came to me, a terrible, impossible thought, so horrible that I doubted my logic. But now two and two were beginning to make four. Could those men be the *masters?* They came and bought and left—to go to the cellar and stay there!

"Oh! Donna Marchesi!" I whispered. "How about those cat-eyes? If you had a hand in this, you are not a woman. You are a tiger."

I THOUGHT that I understood part of it. The latest master came to her for the key to the cellar, and then, when he once passed through the door he never left. She and her servants were not there to welcome me that night, because she did not know that I had a key.

The thought came to me that perhaps one of those sleeping men was George Seabrook. He and I used to play tennis together and we knew each other like brothers. He had a large scar on the back of his right hand; a livid star-shaped scar. With that in mind, I walked carefully from sleeping man to sleeping man, looking at their right hands. And I found a right hand with a scar that was shaped like the one I knew so well. But that blind man, only a skin-covered skeleton, chained to a bed of stone! That could not be my gay young tennis player, George!

The discovery nauseated me. What did it mean? What *could* it mean? If the Donna Marchesi was back of all that misery, what was her motive?

Down the long cave-like room I went. There seemed to be no end to it, though many of the columns were surrounded with empty chains. Only those near the door had their human flies in the trap. In the opposite direction the rows of pillars stretched into a far oblivion. I thought that at the end there was the black mouth of a tunnel, but I could not be sure and dared not go that far to explore the truth. Then, out of that tunnel, I heard a voice come, a singing voice. Slipping my shoes off, I ran back near the door and hid as best I could in a dark recess, back of a far piece of stone. I stood there in the darkness, my torch out, the handle of the revolver in my hand.

The singing grew louder and louder, and then the singer came into view. It was none other than Donna Marchesi! She carried a lantern in one hand and a basket in the other. Hanging the lantern on a nail, she took the basket and went from one sleeping man to another. With each her performance was the same; she awakened them with a kick in the face, and then, when they sat up crying with pain, she placed a hard roll of bread in their blind, trembling, outstretched hand. With all fed, there was silence save for gnawing teeth breaking through the hard crusts. The poor devils were hungry, starving slowly to death, and how they wolfed the bread! She laughed with animal delight as they cried for more. Standing under the lamp, a lovely devil in her decolleté dress, she laughed at them. I swear I saw her yellow eyes, dilated in the semi-darkness!

Suddenly she gave the command.

"Up! you dogs, *up!*"

LIKE well-trained animals they rose to their feet, clumsily, but as fast as they could under the handicap of trembling limbs and heavy chains. Two were slow in obeying, and those she struck across

the face with a small whip, till they whined with pain.

They stood there in silence, twenty odd blind men, chained against as many pillars of stone; and then the woman, standing in the middle of them, started to sing. It was a well-trained voice, but metallic, and her high notes had in them the cry of a wild animal. No feminine softness there. She sang from an Italian opera, and I knew that I had heard that song before. While she sang, her audience waited silently. At last she finished, and they started to applaud. Shrunken hands beat noisily against shrunken hands.

She seemed to watch them carefully, as though she were measuring the degree of their appreciation. One man did not satisfy her. She went over and dug into his face with long strokes of those long red nails until his face was red and her fingers bloody. And when she finished her second song that man clapped louder than any of them. He had learned his lesson.

She ended by giving them each another roll and a dipper of water. Then, lantern and basket in her hands, she walked away and disappeared down the tunnel. The blind men, crying and cursing in their impotent rage, sank down on their stone beds.

I went to my friend, and took his hand.

"George! George Seabrook!" I whispered.

He sat up and cried, "Who calls me? Who is there?"

I told him, and he started to cry. At last he became quiet enough to talk to me. What he told me, with slight variants, was the story of all the men there and all the men who had been there but who had died. Each man had been master for a day or a week. Each had found the cellar door and had come to the Donna Marchesi for the key. Some had been suspicious and had written their thoughts on the wall of their bedroom. But one and all had, in the end, found their curiosity more than they could resist and had opened the door. On the other side they had been overpowered and chained to a pillar, and there they had remained till they died. Some of them lived longer than the rest. Smith of Boston had been there over two years, though he was coughing badly and did not think that he could last much longer. Seabrook told me their names. They were the best blood of America, with three Englishmen and one Frenchman.

"And are you all blind?" I whispered, dreading the answer.

"Yes. That happens the first night we are here. She does it with her nails."

"And she comes every night?"

"Every night. She feeds us and sings to us and we applaud. When one of us dies, she unchains the body, and throws it down a hole somewhere. She talks to us about that hole sometimes and brags that she is going to fill it up before she stops."

"But who is helping her?"

"I think it is the real-estate man. Of course, the old devils upstairs help. I think that they must drug us. Some of the men say that they went to sleep in their beds and woke, chained to their posts."

My voice trembled as I bent over and whispered in his ear, "What would you do, George, if she came and sang, and you found that you were not chained? You and the other men not chained? What would you men do, George?"

"Ask them," he snarled. "Ask them, one at a time. But I know what I would do. I know!"

And he started to cry, because he could not do it the next second; cried from rage and helplessness till the tears ran from his empty sockets.

"Does she always come at the same time?"

"As far as I know. But time is nothing to us. We just wait for death."

"Are the chains locked?"

"Yes. And she must have the key. But we could file the links if only we had files. If only each of us had a file, we could get free. Perhaps the man upstairs has a key, but I hardly think so."

"Did you write on that pretty wall upstairs, the whitewashed wall?"

"I did; I think we all did. One man wrote a sonnet to the woman, verses in her honor, telling about her beautiful eyes. He raved about that poem for hours while he was dying. Did you ever see it on the wall?"

"I did not see it. The old people whitewash the walls before each new master comes."

"I thought so."

"Are you sure you would know what to do, George, if she sang to you and you were loose?"

"Yes, we would know."

So I left him, promising an end to the matter as soon as I could arrange it.

THE next day saw me calling on the Donna Marchesi. I took her flowers that time, a corsage of vivid purple and scarlet orchids. She entertained me in her music room and I, taking the hint, asked her to sing. Shyly, almost with reluctance, she did as I asked. She sang the selection from the Italian opera that I knew so well. I was generous in my applause.

She smiled.

"You like to hear me sing?"

"Indeed! I want to hear you again. I could hear you daily without growing tired."

"You're nice," she purred. "Perhaps it could be arranged."

"You are too modest. You have a wonderful voice. Why not give it to the world?"

"I sang once in public," she sighed. "It was in New York, at a private musical. There were many men there. Perhaps it was stage fright; my voice broke badly, and the audience, especially the men, were not kind. I am not sure, but I thought that I heard some of them hiss me."

"Surely not!" I protested.

"Indeed, so. But no man has hissed my singing since then."

"I hope not!" I replied indignantly. "You have a wonderful voice, and, when I applauded you, I was sincere. By the way, may I change my mind and ask for the key to the door in the cellar?"

"Do you want it, really want it, my friend?"

"I am sure I do. I may never use it, but it will please me to have it. Little things in life make me happy, and this key is a little thing."

"Then you shall have it. Will you do me a favor? Wait till Sunday to use it. Today is Friday, and you will not have to wait many hours."

"It will be a pleasure to do as you desire," I replied, kissing her hand. "And shall I hear you sing again? May I come often to hear you sing?"

"I promise you that," she sighed. "I am sure that you will hear me sing often in the future. I feel that in some way our fates approach the same star."

I looked into her eyes, her yellow cat-eyes, and I was sure that she spoke the truth. Destiny had certainly brought me to find her in Sorona.

I BOUGHT two dozen rat-tailed files, and dashed across the mountains to Milan. There I was closeted with the consuls of three nations: England, France and my own. They did not want to believe my story. I gave them names, and

they had to admit that there had been inquiries, but they felt that the main details were nightmares, resulting from an over-use of Italian wines. But I insisted that I was not drunk with new wine. At last, they called in the chief of the detective bureau. He knew Franco, the real-estate agent; also the lady in question. And he had heard something of the villa; not much, but vague whisperings.

"We will be there Saturday night," he promised. "That leaves you tonight. The lady will not try to trap you till Sunday. Can you attend to the old people?"

"They will be harmless. See that Franco does not have a chance to escape. Here is the extra key to the door. I will go through before twelve. When I am ready, I will open the door. If I am not out by one in the morning, you come through with your police. Do we all understand?"

"I understand," said the American consul. "But I still think you are dreaming."

Back at the villa, I again drugged the old people, not much, but enough to insure their sleep that night. They liked me. I was liberal with my gold, and I carelessly showed them where I kept my reserve.

Then I went through the door. Again I heard the Donna Marchesi sing to an audience that would never hiss her. She left, and I started to distribute the files. From one blind wretch to the next I went, whispering words of cheer and instruction for the next night. They were to cut through a link in the chain, but in such a way that the Tiger Cat would not suspect that they had gained their liberty. Were they pleased to have a hope of freedom? I am not sure, but they were delighted at another prospect.

The next night I doubled the tips to the old servants. With tears of gratitude in their eyes, they thanked me as they called me their dear master. I put them to sleep as though they were babies. In fact, I wondered at the time if they would ever recover from the dose of chloral I gave them. I did not even bother to tie them, but just tossed them on their beds.

At half past ten, automobiles began to arrive with darkened lights. We had a lengthy conference, and soon after eleven I went through the door. I lost no time in making sure that each of the blind mice was a free man, but I insisted that they act as though bound till the proper time. They were trembling, but it was not from fear, not that time.

Back in my hiding-place I waited, and soon I heard the singing voice. Ten minutes later the Donna Marchesi had her lantern hung on the nail. Ah! She was more beautiful that night than I had ever seen her. Dressed in filmy white, her beautiful body, lovely hair, long lithe limbs would have bound any man to her through eternity. She seemed to sense that beauty, for, after giving out the first supply of rolls, she varied her program. She told her audience how she had dressed that evening for their special pleasure. She described her jewels and her costume. She almost became grandiose as she told of her beauty, and, driving in the dagger, she twisted it as she reminded them that never would they be able to see her, never touch her or kiss her hand. All they could do was to hear her sing, applaud and at last die.

Of all the terrible things in her life that little talk to those blind men was the climax.

And then she sang. I watched her closely, and I saw what I suspected. She sang with her eyes closed. Was she in fancy seeming that she was in an opera-house before thousands of spellbound admirers? Who knows? But ever as she

sang that night her eyes were closed, and even as she came to a close, waiting for the usual applause, her eyes were closed.

She waited in the silence for the clap of hands. It did not come. With terrific anger, she whirled to her basket and reached for her whip.

"Dogs!" she cried. "Have you so soon forgot your lesson?"

And then she realized that the twenty blind men were closing in on her. They were silent, but their outstretched hands were feeling for something that they wanted very much. Even when her whip started to cut, they were silent. Then one man touched her. To her credit, there was no sign of fear. She knew what had happened. She must have known, but she was not afraid. Her single scream was nothing but the battle-cry of the tiger cat going into action.

There was a single cry, and that was all. The men reached for what they wanted in silence. For a while they were all in a struggling group on their feet, but soon they were all on the ground. It was simply a mass, and under that mass was a biting, scratching, fighting, dying animal.

I couldn't stand it. I had planned it all, I wanted it all to happen, but when it came, I just couldn't stand it. Covered with the sweat of fear, I ran to the door and unlocked it. I swung it open, went through the doorway, closed it and locked it again. The men, waiting for me in the cellar, looked on with doubt. It seemed that they were right in thinking that my tale was an alcoholic one.

"Give me whisky!" I gasped, as I dropped on the floor.

In a few minutes I had recovered

"Open the door," I ordered. "And bring the blind men out"

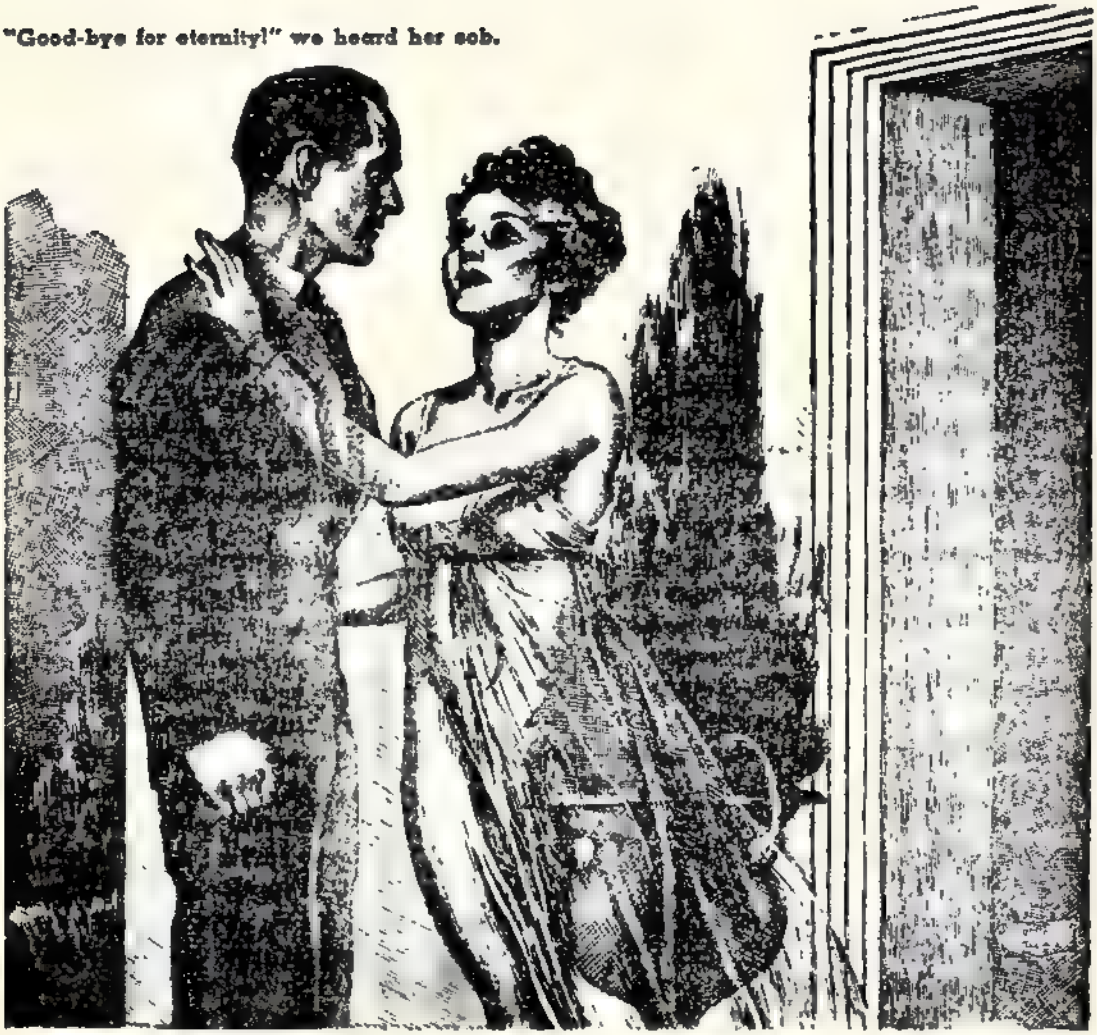
One at a time they were brought to the kitchen, and identified. Some were terribly mutilated in the face, long deep scratches, and even pieces bitten out, and one had the corner of his mouth torn. Most of them were sobbing hysterically, but, in some way, though none said so, I judged that they were all happy.

We went back to the cellar and through the door. On the stone floor was a clotted mass of red and white.

"What's that?" asked the American consul.

"I think that is the Donna Marchesi," I replied. "She must have met with an accident."

"Good-bye for eternity!" we heard her sob.



Pledged to the Dead

By SEABURY QUINN

A tale of a lover who was pledged to a sweetheart who had been in her grave for more than a century, and of the striking death that menaced him—a story of Jules de Grandin

THE autumn dusk had stained the sky with shadows and orange obelisks traced the windows in my neighbors' homes as Jules de Grandin and I sat sipping kaiserslamarm and coffee in the study after dinner. "*Mon Dieu,*" the little Frenchman sighed "I have the melancholy, my friend. The little children run and play along the roadways at Saint Cloud, and on the Ile de France the

pastry cooks set up their booths. *Corblen*, it takes the strength of character not to stop and buy those cakes of so much taste and fancy! The Napoléons, they are crisp and fragile as a coquette's promise, the éclairs filled with cool, sweet cream, the cream-puffs all aglow with cherries. Just to see them is to love life better. They——"

The shrilling of the door-bell startled me. The pressure on the button must have been that of one who leant against it. "Doctor Trowbridge; I must see him right away!" a woman's voice demanded as Nora McGinnis, my household factotum, grudgingly responded to the hail.

"Th' docthor's offiss hours is over, ma'am," Nora answered frigidly. "Ha'f past nine ter eleven in th' marnin', an' two ter four in th' afthernoon is when he sees his patients. If it's an urgent case ye have there's lots o' good young docthors in th' neighborhood, but Docthor Trowbridge——"

"Is he here?" the visitor demanded sharply.

"He is, an' he's afther digestin' his dinner—an' an illigant dinner it wuz, though I do say so as shouldn't—an' he can't be disturbed——"

"He'll see me, all right. Tell him it's Nella Bentley, and I've *got* to talk to him!"

De Grandin raised an eyebrow eloquently. "The fish at the aquarium have greater privacy than we, my friend," he murmured, but broke off as the visitor came clacking down the hall on high French heels and rushed into the study half a dozen paces in advance of my thoroughly disapproving and more than semi-scandalized Nora.

"Doctor Trowbridge, won't you help me?" cried the girl as she fairly leaped across the study and flung her arms about my shoulders. "I can't tell Dad or Mother, they wouldn't understand; so you're the only one—oh, excuse me, I thought you were alone!" Her face went crimson as she saw de Grandin standing by the fire.

"It's quite all right, my dear," I soothed, freeing myself from her almost hysterical clutch. "This is Doctor de Grandin, with whom I've been associated many times; I'd be glad to have the benefit of his advice, if you don't mind."

She gave him her hand and a wan smile as I performed the introduction, but her eyes warmed quickly as he raised her fingers to his lips with a soft *"Enchanté, Mademoiselle."* Women, animals and children took instinctively to Jules de Grandin.

Nella dropped her coat of silky shaven lamb and sank down on the study couch, her slim young figure molded in her knitted dress of coral rayon as revealingly as though she had been cased in plastic cellulose. She has long, violet eyes and a long mouth; smooth, dark hair parted in the middle; a small straight nose, and a small pointed chin. Every line of her is long, but definitely feminine: breasts and hips and throat and legs all delicately curved, without a hint of angularity.

"I've come to see you about Ned," she volunteered as de Grandin lit her cigarette and she sent a nervous smoke-stream gushing from between red, trembling lips. "He—he's trying to run out on me!"

"You mean Ned Minton?" I asked, wondering what a middle-aged physician could prescribe for wandering Romeos.

"I certainly do mean Ned Minton," she replied, "and I mean business, too. The darn, romantic fool!"

De Grandin's slender brows arched upward till they nearly met the beige-blond hair that slanted sleekly backward from his forehead. *"Pardonnez-moi,"* he murmured. "Did I understand correctly,

Mademoiselle? Your *amoureux*—how do you say him?—sweetheart?—has shown a disposition toward unfaithfulness, yet you accuse him of romanticism?"

"He's not unfaithful, that's the worst of it. He's faithful as Tristan and the chevalier Bayard lumped together, *sans peur et sans reproche*, you know. Says we can't get married, 'cause ——"

"Just a moment, dear," I interrupted as I felt my indignation mounting. "D'ye mean the miserable young puppy cheated, and now wants to welch ——"

HER blue eyes widened, then the little laughter-wrinkles formed around them. "You dear old mid-Victorian!" she broke in. "No, he ain't done wrong by our Nell, and I'm not asking you to take your shotgun down and force him to make me an honest woman. Suppose we start at the beginning: then we'll get things straight.

"You assisted at both our débuts, I've been told; you've known Ned and me since we were a second old apiece, haven't you?"

I nodded.

"Know we've always been crazy about each other, too; in grammar school, high school and college, don't you?"

"Yes," I agreed.

"All right. We've been engaged ever since our freshman year at Beaver. Ned just had his frat pin long enough to pin it on my shoulder-strap at the first freshman dance. Everything was set for us to stand up in the chancel and say 'I do' this June; then Ned's company sent him to New Orleans last December." She paused, drew deeply at her cigarette, crushed its fire out in an ash-tray, and set a fresh one glowing.

"That started it. While he was down there it seemed that he got playful. Mixed up with some glamorous Creole gal." Once more she lapsed into silence and I could see the heartbreak showing through the armor of her flippant manner.

"You mean he fell in love——"

"I certainly do *not!* If he had, I'd have handed back his ring and said 'Bless you, me children', even if I had to bite my heart in two to do it; but this is no case of a new love crowding out the old. Ned still loves me; never stopped loving me. That's what makes it all seem crazy as a hashish-eater's dream. He was on the loose in New Orleans, doing the town with a crowd of local boys, and prob'bly had too many Ramos fizzes. Then he barged into this Creole dame's place, and——" she broke off with a gallant effort at a smile. "I guess young fellows aren't so different nowadays than they were when you were growing up, sir Only today we don't believe in sprinkling perfume in the family cesspool. Ned cheated, that's the bald truth of it; he didn't stop loving me, and he hasn't stopped now, but I wasn't there and that other girl was, and there were no conventions to be recognized. Now he's fairly melting with remorse, says he's not worthy of me—wants to break off our engagement, while he spends a lifetime doing penance for a moment's folly."

"But good heavens," I expostulated, "if you're willing to forgive ——"

"You're telling me!" she answered bitterly. "We've been over it a hundred times. This isn't 1892; even nice girls know the facts of life today, and while I'm no more anxious than the next one to put through a deal in shopworn goods, I still love Ned, and I don't intend to let a single indiscretion rob us of our happiness. I——" the hard exterior veneer of modernism melted from her like an autumn ice-glaze melting in the warm October sun, and the tears coursed down her cheeks, cutting little valleys in her carefully-applied make-up. "He's my man, Doctor," she sobbed bitterly. "I've

loved him since we made mud-pies together; I'm hungry, thirsty for him. He's everything to me, and if he follows out this fool renunciation he seems set on, it'll kill me!"

De Grandin tweaked a waxed mustache-end thoughtfully. "You exemplify the practicality of woman, *Mademoiselle;* I applaud your sound, hard common sense," he told her. "Bring this silly young romantic foolish one to me. I will tell him——"

"But he won't come," I interrupted. "I know these hard-minded young asses. When a lad is set on being stubborn——"

"Will you go to work on him if I can get him here?" interjected Nella.

"Of a certitude, *Mademoiselle.*"

"You won't think me forward or unmaidenly?"

"This is a medical consultation, *Mademoiselle.*"

"All right; be in the office this time tomorrow night. I'll have my wandering boy friend here if I have to bring him in an ambulance."

HER performance matched her promise almost too closely for our comfort. We had just finished dinner next night when the frenzied shriek of tortured brakes, followed by a crash and the tinkling spatter of smashed glass, sounded in the street before the house, and in a moment feet dragged heavily across the porch. We were at the door before the bell could buzz, and in the disk of brightness sent down by the porch light saw Nella bent half double, stumbling forward with a man's arm draped across her shoulders. His feet scuffed blindly on the boards, as though they had forgot the trick of walking, or as if all strength had left his knees. His head hung forward, lolling drunkenly; a spate of blood ran down his face and smeared his collar.

"Good Lord!" I gasped. "What——"

"Get him in the surgery—quick!" the girl commanded in a whisper. "I'm afraid I rather overdid it."

Examination showed the cut across Ned's forehead was more bloody than extensive, while the scalp-wound which plowed backward from his hairline needed but a few quick stitches.

Nella whispered to us as we worked. "I got him to go riding with me in my runabout. Just as we got here I let out a scream and swung the wheel hard over to the right. I was braced for it, but Ned was unprepared, and went right through the windshield when I ran the car into the curb. Lord, I thought I'd killed him when I saw the blood—you do think he'll come through all right, don't you, Doctor?"

"No thanks to you if he does, you little ninny!" I retorted angrily. "You might have cut his jugular with your confounded foolishness. If ——"

"*S-s-sh,* he's coming out of it!" she warned. "Start talking to him like a Dutch uncle; I'll be waiting in the study if you want me," and with a tattoo of high heels she left us with our patient.

"Nella! Is she all right?" Ned cried as he half roused from the surgery table. "We had an accident——"

"But certainly, *Monsieur,*" de Grandin soothed. "You were driving past our house when a child ran out before your car and *Mademoiselle* was forced to swerve aside to keep from hitting it. You were cut about the face, but she escaped all injury. Here"—he raised a glass of brandy to the patient's lips—"drink this. Ah, so. That is better, *n'est-ce-pas?*"

For a moment he regarded Ned in silence, then, abruptly: "You are distrait, *Monsieur.* When we brought you in we were forced to give you a small whiff of ether while we patched your cuts, and in your delirium you said——"

The color which had come into Ned's

cheeks as the fiery cognac warmed his veins drained out again, leaving him as ghastly as a corpse. "Did Nella hear me?" he asked hoarsely. "Did I blab——"

"Compose yourself, *Mon ieur*," de Grandin bade. "She heard nothing, but it would be well if we heard more. I think I understand your difficulty. I am a physician and a Frenchman and no prude. This renunciation which you make is but the noble gesture. You have been unfortunate, and now you fear. Have courage; no infection is so bad there is no remedy——"

Ned's laugh was hard and brittle as the tinkle of a breaking glass. "I only wish it were the thing you think," he interrupted. "I'd have you give me salvarsan and see what happened; but there isn't any treatment I can take for this. I'm not delirious, and I'm not crazy, gentlemen; I know just what I'm saying. Insane as it may sound, I'm pledged to the dead, and there isn't any way to bail me out."

"*Eh*, what is it you say?" de Grandin's small blue eyes were gleaming with the light of battle as he caught the occult implication in Ned's declaration. "Pledged to the dead? *Comment cela?*"

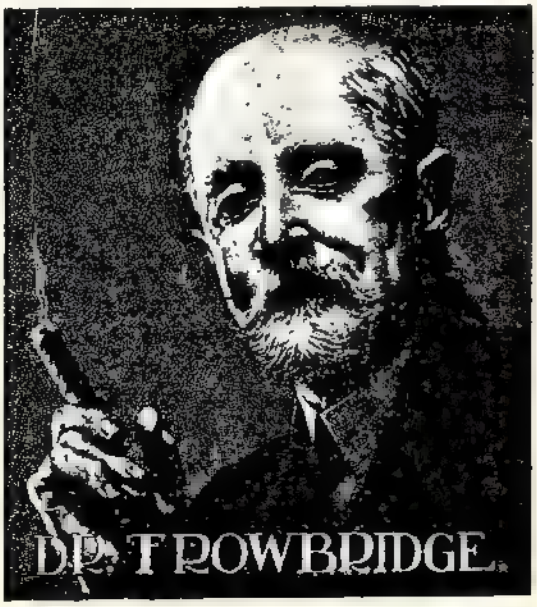
NED raised himself unsteadily and balanced on the table edge.

"It happened in New Orleans last winter," he answered. "I'd finished up my business and was on the loose, and thought I'd walk alone through the *Vieux Carré*—the old French Quarter. I'd had dinner at Antoine's and stopped around at the Old Absinthe House for a few drinks, then strolled down to the French Market for a cup of chicory coffee and some doughnuts. Finally I walked down Royal Street to look at Madame Lalaurie's old mansion: that's the famous haunted house, you know. I wanted to see if I could find a ghost. Good Lord, I *wanted* to!

"The moon was full that night, but the house was still as old Saint Denis Cemetery, so after peering through the iron grilles that shut the courtyard from the street for half an hour or so, I started back toward Canal Street.

"I'd almost reached Bienville Street when just as I passed one of those funny two-storied iron-grilled balconies so many of the old houses have I heard something drop on the sidewalk at my feet. It was a japonica, one of those rose-like flowers they grow in the courtyard gardens down there. When I looked up, a girl was laughing at me from the second story of the balcony. '*Mon fleuron, monsieur, s'il vous plait,*' she called, stretching down a white arm for the bloom.

"The moonlight hung about her like a veil of silver tissue, and I could see her plainly as though it had been noon. Most New Orleans girls are dark. She was fair, her hair was very fine and silky and about the color of a frosted chestnut-burr. She wore it in a long bob with curls around her face and neck, and I knew



without being told that those ringlets weren't put in with a hot iron. Her face was pale, colorless and fine-textured as a magnolia petal, but her lips were brilliant crimson. There was something reminiscent of those ladies you see pictured in Directoire prints about her; small, regular features, straight, white, high-waisted gown tied with a wide girdle underneath her bosom, low, round-cut neck and tiny, ball-puff sleeves that left her lovely arms uncovered to the shoulder. She was like Rose Beauharnais or Madame de Fontenay, except for her fair hair, and her eyes. Her eyes were like an Eastern slave's, languishing and passionate, even when she laughed. And she was laughing then, with a throaty, almost caressing laugh as I tossed the flower up to her and she leant across the iron railing, snatching at it futilely as it fell just short of reach.

" '*C'est sans profit,*' she laughed at last. 'Your skill is too small or my arm too short, *m'sieur*. Bring it up to me.'

" 'You mean for me to come up there?' I asked.

" 'But certainly. I have teeth, but will not bite you—maybe.'

"The street door to the house was open; I pushed it back, groped my way along a narrow hall and climbed a flight of winding stairs. She was waiting for me on the balcony, lovelier, close up, if that were possible, than when I'd seen her from the sidewalk. Her gown was China silk, so sheer and clinging that the shadow of her charming figure showed against its rippling folds like a lovely silhouette; the sash which bound it was a six-foot length of rainbow ribbon tied coquettishly beneath her shoulders and trailing in fringed ends almost to her dress-hem at the back; her feet were stockingless and shod with sandals fastened with cross-straps of purple grosgrain laced about the ankles. Save for the small gold rings that scintillated in her ears, she wore no ornaments of any kind.

" '*Mon fleur, m'sieur,*' she ordered haughtily, stretching out her hand; then her eyes lighted with sudden laughter and she turned her back to me, bending her head forward. 'But no, it fell into your hands; it is that you must put in its place again,' she ordered, pointing to a curl where she wished the flower set. 'Come, *m'sieur*, I wait upon you.'

"On the settee by the wall a guitar lay. She picked it up and ran her slim, pale fingers twice across the strings, sounding a soft, melancholy chord. When she began to sing, her words were slurred and languorous, and I had trouble understanding them; for the song was ancient when Bienville turned the first spadeful of earth that marked the ramparts of New Orleans:

O knights of gay Toulouse
And sweet Beaucaire,
Greet me my own true love
And speak him fair . . .

"Her voice had the throaty, velvety quality one hears in people of the Southern countries, and the words of the song seemed fairly to yearn with the sadness and passionate longing of the love-bereft. But she smiled as she put by her instrument, a curious smile, which heightened the mystery of her face, and her wide eyes seemed suddenly half questing, half drowsy, as she asked, 'Would you ride off upon your grim, pale horse and leave poor little Julie d'Ayen famishing for love, *m'sieur?*'

" 'Ride off from you?' I answered gallantly. 'How can you ask?' A verse from Burns came to me:

Then fare thee well, my bonny lass,
And fare thee well awhile,
And I shall come to thee again
As it were ten thousand mile.

"There was something avid in the look she gave me. Something more than mere gratified vanity shone in her eyes as she

turned her face up to me in the moonlight. 'You mean it?' she demanded in a quivering, breathless voice.

" 'Of course,' I bantered. 'How could you doubt it?'

" 'Then swear it—seal the oath with blood!'

"Her eyes were almost closed, and her lips were lightly parted as she leant toward me. I could see the thin, white line of tiny, gleaming teeth behind the lush red of her lips; the tip of a pink tongue swept across her mouth, leaving it warmer, moister, redder than before; in her throat a small pulse throbbed palpitatingly. Her lips were smooth and soft as the flower-petals in her hair, but as they crushed on mine they seemed to creep about them as though endowed with a volition of their own. I could feel them gliding almost stealthily, searching greedily, it seemed, until they covered my entire mouth. Then came a sudden searing burn of pain which passed as quickly as it flashed across my lips, and she seemed inhaling deeply, desperately, as though to pump the last faint gasp of breath up from my lungs. A humming sounded in my ears; everything went dark around me as if I had been plunged in some abysmal flood; a spell of dreamy lassitude was stealing over me when she pushed me from her so abruptly that I staggered back against the iron railing of the gallery.

"I GASPED and fought for breath like a winded swimmer coming from the water, but the half-recaptured breath seemed suddenly to catch itself unbidden in my throat, and a tingling chill went rippling up my spine. The girl had dropped down to her knees, staring at the door which let into the house, and as I looked I saw a shadow writhe across the little pool of moonlight which lay upon the sill. Three feet or so in length it was, thick through as a man's wrist, the faint light shining dully on its scaly armor and disclosing the forked lightning of its darting tongue. It was a cottonmouth—a water moccasin—deadly as a rattlesnake, but more dangerous, for it sounds no warning before striking, and can strike when only half coiled. How it came there on the second-story gallery of a house so far from any swampland I had no means of knowing, but there it lay, bent in the design of a double S, its wedge-shaped head swaying on upreared neck a scant six inches from the girl's soft bosom, its forked tongue darting deathly menace. Half paralyzed with fear and loathing, I stood there in a perfect ecstasy of horror, not daring to move hand or foot lest I aggravate the reptile into striking. But my terror changed to stark amazement as my senses slowly registered the scene. The girl was talking to the snake and—it listened as a person might have done!

" '*Non, non, grand'tante; halte là!*' she whispered. '*Cela est à moi—il est dévoué!*'

"The serpent seemed to pause uncertainly, grudgingly, as though but half convinced, then shook its head from side to side, much as an aged person might when only half persuaded by a youngster's argument. Finally, silently as a shadow, it slithered back again into the darkness of the house.

"Julie bounded to her feet and put her hands upon my shoulders.

" 'You mus' go, my friend,' she whispered fiercely. 'Quickly, ere she comes again. It was not easy to convince her; she is old and very doubting. O, I am afraid—afraid!'

"She hid her face against my arm, and I could feel the throbbing of her heart against me. Her hands stole upward to my cheeks and pressed them between palms as cold as graveyard clay as she whis-

pered, 'Look at me, *mon beau*.' Her eyes were closed, her lips were slightly parted, and beneath the arc of her long lashes I could see the glimmer of fast-forming tears. '*Embrasse moi*', she commanded in a trembling breath. 'Kiss me and go quickly, but O *mon chèr*, do not forget poor little foolish Julie d'Ayen who has put her trust in you. Come to me again tomorrow night!'

"I was reeling as from vertigo as I walked back to the Greenwald, and the bartender looked at me suspiciously when I ordered a sazarac. They've a strict rule against serving drunken men at that hotel. The liquor stung my lips like liquid flame, and I put the cocktail down half finished. When I set the fan to going and switched the light on in my room I looked into the mirror and saw two little beads of fresh, bright blood upon my lips. 'Good Lord!' I murmured stupidly as I brushed the blood away; 'she bit me!'

"It all seemed so incredible that if I had not seen the blood upon my mouth I'd have thought I suffered from some lunatic hallucination, or one too many frappés at the Absinthe House. Julie was as quaint and out of time as a Directoire print, even in a city where time stands still as it does in old New Orleans. Her costume, her half-shy boldness, her—this was simply madness, nothing less!—her conversation with that snake!

"What was it she had said? My French was none too good, and in the circumstances it was hardly possible to pay attention to her words, but if I'd understood her, she'd declared, 'He's mine; he has dedicated himself to me!' And she'd addressed that crawling horror as '*grand'tante*—great-aunt!'

" 'Feller, you're as crazy as a cockroach!' I admonished my reflection in the mirror. 'But I know what'll cure you. You're taking the first train north tomorrow morning, and if I ever catch you in the *Vieux Carré* again, I'll——'

"A sibilating hiss, no louder than the noise made by steam escaping from a kettle-spout, sounded close beside my foot. There on the rug, coiled in readiness to strike, was a three-foot cottonmouth, head swaying viciously from side to side, wicked eyes shining in the bright light from the chandelier. I saw the muscles in the creature's fore-part swell, and in a sort of horror-trance I watched its head dart forward, but, miraculously, it stopped its stroke half-way, and drew its head back, turning to glance menacingly at me first from one eye, then the other. Somehow, it seemed to me, the thing was playing with me as a cat might play a mouse, threatening, intimidating, letting me know it was master of the situation and could kill me any time it wished, but deliberately refraining from the death-stroke.

"With one leap I was in the middle of my bed, and when a squad of bellboys came running in response to the frantic call for help I telephoned, they found me crouched against the headboard, almost wild with fear.

"They turned the room completely inside out, rolling back the rugs, probing into chairs and sofa, emptying the bureau drawers, even taking down the towels from the bathroom rack, but nowhere was there any sign of the water moccasin that had terrified me. At the end of fifteen minutes' search they accepted half a dollar each and went grinning from the room. I knew it would be useless to appeal for help again, for I heard one whisper to another as they paused outside my door: 'It ain't right to let them Yankees loose in N'Orleans; they don't know how to hold their licker.'

"I didn't take a train next morning. Somehow, I'd an idea—crazy as it seemed—that my promise to myself and the sudden, inexplicable appearance of the snake beside my foot were related in some way. Just after luncheon I thought I'd put the theory to a test.

" 'Well,' I said aloud, 'I guess I might as well start packing. Don't want to let the sun go down and find me here——'

"My theory was right. I hadn't finished speaking when I heard the warning hiss, and there, poised ready for the stroke, the snake was coiled before the door. And it was no phantom, either, no figment of an overwrought imagination. It lay upon a rug the hotel management had placed before the door to take the wear of constant passage from the carpet, and I could see the high pile of the rug crushed down beneath its weight. It was flesh and scales—and fangs!—and it coiled and threatened me in my twelfth-floor room in the bright sunlight of the afternoon.

"Little chills of terror chased each other up my back, and I could feel the short hairs on my neck grow stiff and scratch against my collar, but I kept myself in hand. Pretending to ignore the loathsome thing, I flung myself upon the bed.

" 'Oh, well,' I said aloud, 'there really isn't any need of hurrying. I promised Julie that I'd come to her tonight, and I mustn't disappoint her.' Half a minute later I roused myself upon my elbow and glanced toward the door. The snake was gone.

" 'Here's a letter for you, Mr. Minton,' said the desk clerk as I paused to leave my key. The note was on gray paper edged with silver-gilt, and very highly scented. The penmanship was tiny, stilted and ill-formed, as though the author were unused to writing, but I could make it out:

Adoré
Meet me in St. Denis Cemetery at sunset
A vous de coeur pour l'éternité
Julie

"I stuffed the note back in my pocket. The more I thought about the whole affair the less I liked it. The flirtation had begun harmlessly enough, and Julie was as lovely and appealing as a figure in a fairy-tale, but there are unpleasant aspects to most fairy-tales, and this was no exception. That scene last night when she had seemed to argue with a full-grown cottonmouth, and the mysterious appearance of the snake whenever I spoke of breaking my promise to go back to her—there was something too much like black magic in it. Now she addressed me as her adored and signed herself for eternity; finally named a graveyard as our rendezvous. Things had become a little bit too thick.

"I was standing at the corner of Canal and Baronne Streets, and crowds of office workers and late shoppers elbowed past me. 'I'll be damned if I'll meet her in a cemetery, or anywhere else,' I muttered. 'I've had enough of all this nonsense——'

"A woman's shrill scream, echoed by a man's hoarse shout of terror, interrupted me. On the marble pavement of Canal Street, with half a thousand people bustling by, lay coiled a three-foot water moccasin. Here was proof. I'd seen it twice in my room at the hotel, but I'd been alone each time. Some form of weird hypnosis might have made me think I saw it, but the screaming woman and the shouting man, these panic-stricken people in Canal Street, couldn't all be victims of a spell which had been cast on me. 'All right, I'll go,' I almost shouted, and instantly, as though it been but a puff of smoke, the snake was gone, the half-fainting woman and a crowd of

curious bystanders asking what was wrong left to prove I had not been the victim of some strange delusion.

"OLD Saint Denis Cemetery lay drowsing in the blue, faint twilight. It has no graves as we know them, for when the city was laid out it was below sea-level and bodies were stored away in crypts set row on row like lines of pigeon-holes in walls as thick as those of mediæval castles. Grass-grown aisles run between the rows of vaults, and the effect is a true city of the dead with narrow streets shut in by close-set houses. The rattle of a trolley car in Rampart Street came to me faintly as I walked between the rows of tombs; from the river came the mellow-throated bellow of a steamer's whistle, but both sounds were muted as though heard from a great distance. The tomb-lined bastions of Saint Denis hold the present out as firmly as they hold the memories of the past within.

"Down one aisle and up another I walked, the close-clipped turf deadening my footfalls so I might have been a ghost come back to haunt the ancient burial ground, but nowhere was there sign or trace of Julie. I made the circuit of the labyrinth and finally paused before one of the more pretentious tombs.

" 'Looks as if she'd stood me up,' I murmured. 'If she has, I have a good excuse to ——'

" 'But *non, mon coeur,* I have not disappointed you!' a soft voice whispered in my ear. 'See, I am here.'

"I think I must have jumped at sound of her greeting, for she clapped her hands delightedly before she put them on my shoulders and turned her face up for a kiss. 'Silly one,' she chided, 'did you think your Julie was unfaithful?'

"I put her hands away as gently as I could, for her utter self-surrender was embarrassing. 'Where were you?' I asked, striving to make neutral conversation. 'I've been prowling round this graveyard for the last half-hour, and came through this aisle not a minute ago, but I didn't see you ——'

" 'Ah, but I saw you, *chéri:* I have watched you as you made your solemn rounds like a watchman of the night. *Oh!,* but it was hard to wait until the sun went down to greet you, *mon petit!*'

"She laughed again, and her mirth was mellowly musical as the gurgle of cool water poured from a silver vase.

" 'How could you have seen me?' I demanded. 'Where were you all this time?'

" 'But here, of course,' she answered naïvely, resting one hand against the graystone slab that sealed the tomb.

"I shook my head bewilderedly. The tomb, like all the others in the deeply recessed wall, was of rough cement incrusted with small seashells, and its sides were straight and blank without a spear of ivy clinging to them. A sparrow could not have found cover there, yet . . .

"Julie raised herself on tiptoe and stretched her arms out right and left while she looked at me through half-closed, smiling eyes. '*Je suis engourdie*—I am stiff with sleep,' she told me, stifling a yawn. 'But now that you are come, *mon cher,* I am wakeful as the pussy-cat that rouses at the scampering of the mouse. Come, let us walk in this garden of mine.' She linked her arm through mine and started down the grassy, grave-lined path.

"Tiny shivers — not of cold — were flickering through my cheeks and down my neck beneath my ears. I *had* to have an explanation . . . the snake, her declaration that she watched me as I searched the cemetery—and from a tomb where a beetle could not have found a hiding-place—her announcement she was still stiff from sleeping, now her reference

to a half-forgotten graveyard as her garden.

" 'See here, I want to know——' I started, but she laid her hand across my lips.

" 'Do not ask to know too soon, *mon coeur*,' she bade. 'Look at me, am I not veritably *élégante?*' She stood back a step, gathered up her skirts and swept me a deep curtsy.

"There was no denying she was beautiful. Her tightly curling hair had been combed high and tied back with a fillet of bright violet tissue which bound her brows like a diadem and at the front of which an aigret plume was set. In her ears were hung two beautifully matched cameos, outlined in gold and seed-pearls, and almost large as silver dollars; a necklace of antique dull-gold hung round her throat, and its pendant was a duplicate of her ear-cameos, while a bracelet of matt-gold set with a fourth matched anaglyph was clasped about her left arm just above the elbow. Her gown was sheer white muslin, low cut at front and back, with little puff-sleeves at the shoulders, fitted tightly at the bodice and flaring sharply from a high-set waist. Over it she wore a narrow scarf of violet silk, hung behind her neck and dropping down on either side in front like a clergyman's stole. Her sandals were gilt leather, heelless as a ballet dancer's shoes and laced with violet ribbons. Her lovely, pearl-white hands were bare of rings, but on the second toe of her right foot there showed a little cameo which matched the others which she wore.

"I could feel my heart begin to pound and my breath come quicker as I looked at her, but:

" 'You look as if you're going to a masquerade,' I said.

"A look of hurt surprize showed in her eyes. 'A masquerade?' she echoed. 'But no, it is my best, my very finest, that I wear for you tonight, *mon adoré*. Do not you like it; do you not love me, Édouard?'

" 'No,' I answered shortly, 'I do not. We might as well understand each other, Julie. I'm not in love with you and I never was. It's been a pretty flirtation, nothing more. I'm going home tomorrow, and——'

" 'But you will come again? Surely you will come again?' she pleaded. 'You cannot mean it when you say you do not love me, Édouard. Tell me that you spoke so but to tease me——'

"A warning hiss sounded in the grass beside my foot, but I was too angry to be frightened. 'Go ahead, set your devilish snake on me,' I taunted. 'Let it bite me. I'd as soon be dead as——'

"The snake was quick, but Julie quicker. In the split-second required for the thing to drive at me she leaped across the grass-grown aisle and pushed me back. So violent was the shove she gave me that I fell against the tomb, struck my head against a small projecting stone and stumbled to my knees. As I fought for footing on the slippery grass I saw the deadly, wedge-shaped head strike full against the girl's bare ankle and heard her gasp with pain. The snake recoiled and swung its head toward me, but Julie dropped down to her knees and spread her arms protectingly about me.

" '*Non, non, grand'tante!*' she screamed; 'not this one! Let me——' Her voice broke on a little gasp and with a retching hiccup she sank limply to the grass.

"I tried to rise, but my foot slipped on the grass and I fell back heavily against the tomb, crashing my brow against its shell-set cement wall. I saw Julie lying in a little huddled heap of white against the blackness of the sward, and, shadowy but clearly visible, an aged, wrinkled Negress with turbaned head and cambric,

apron bending over her, nursing her head against her bosom and rocking back and forth grotesquely while she crooned a wordless threnody. Where had she come from? I wondered idly. Where had the snake gone? Why did the moonlight seem to fade and flicker like a dying lamp? Once more I tried to rise, but slipped back to the grass before the tomb as everything went black before me.

"The lavender light of early morning was streaming over the tomb-walls of the cemetery when I waked. I lay quiet for a little while, wondering sleepily how I came there. Then, just as the first rays of the sun shot through the thinning shadows, I remembered. Julie! The snake had bitten her when she flung herself before me. She was gone; the old Negress —where had *she* come from?—was gone, too, and I was utterly alone in the old graveyard.

"Stiff from lying on the ground, I got myself up awkwardly, grasping at the flower-shelf projecting from the tomb. As my eyes came level with the slab that sealed the crypt I felt the breath catch in my throat. The crypt, like all its fellows, looked for all the world like an old oven let into a brick wall overlaid with peeling plaster. The sealing-stone was probably once white, but years had stained it to a dirty gray, and time had all but rubbed its legend out. Still, I could see the faint inscription carved in quaint, old-fashioned letters, and disbelief gave way to incredulity, which was replaced by panic terror as I read:

Ici repose malheureusement
Julie Amelie Marie d'Ayen
Nationale de Paris France
Née le 29 Aout 1788
Décédée a la N O le 2 Juillet 1807

"Julie! Little Julie whom I'd held in my arms, whose mouth had lain on mine in eager kisses, was a corpse! Dead and in her grave more than a century!"

The silence lengthened. Ned stared miserably before him, his outward eyes unseeing, but his mind's eye turned upon that scene in old Saint Denis Cemetery. De Grandin tugged and tugged again at the ends of his mustache till I thought he'd drag the hairs out by the roots. I could think of nothing which might ease the tension till:

"Of course, the name cut on the tombstone was a piece of pure coincidence,' I hazarded. "Most likely the young woman deliberately assumed it to mislead you——"

"And the snake which threatened our young friend, he was an assumption, also, one infers?" de Grandin interrupted.

"N-o, but it could have been a trick. Ned saw an aged Negress in the cemetery, and those old Southern darkies have strange powers——"

"I damn think that you hit the thumb upon the nail that time, my friend," the little Frenchman nodded, "though you do not realize how accurate your diagnosis is." To Ned:

"Have you seen this snake again since coming North?"

"Yes," Ned replied. "I have. I was too stunned to speak when I read the epitaph, and I wandered back to the hotel in a sort of daze and packed my bags in silence. Possibly that's why there was no further visitation there. I don't know. I do know nothing further happened, though, and when several months had passed with nothing but my memories to remind me of the incident, I began to think I'd suffered from some sort of walking nightmare. Nella and I went ahead with preparations for our wedding, but three weeks ago the postman brought me this——"

He reached into an inner pocket and drew out an envelope. It was of soft gray

paper, edged with silver-gilt, and the address was in tiny, almost unreadable script:

M. Edouard Minton,
50 Rue Carteret Sd,
Harrisonville, N. J.

"U'm?" de Grandin commented as he inspected it. "It is addressed *à la française*. And the letter, may one read it?"

"Of course," Ned answered. "I'd like you to.

Across de Grandin's shoulder I made out the hastily-scrawled missive:

Adoré
Remember your promise and the kiss of blood that sealed it. Soon I shall call and you must come.
Pour le temps et pour l'éternité,
JULIE.

"You recognize the writing?" de Grandin asked. "It is——"

"Oh, yes," Ned answered bitterly. "I recognize it; it's the same the other note was written in."

"And then?"

The boy smiled bleakly. "I crushed the thing into a ball and threw it on the floor and stamped on it. Swore I'd die before I'd keep another rendezvous with her, and——" He broke off, and put trembling hands up to his face.

"The so mysterious serpent came again, one may assume?" de Grandin prompted.

"But it's only a phantom snake," I interjected. "At worst it's nothing more than a terrifying vision——"

"Think so?" Ned broke in. "D'ye remember Rowdy, my airedale terrier?"

I nodded.

"He was in the room when I opened this letter, and when the cottonmouth appeared beside me on the floor he made a dash for it. Whether it would have struck me I don't know, but it struck at him as he leaped and caught him squarely in the throat. He thrashed and fought, and the thing held on with locked jaws till I grabbed a fire-shovel and made for it; then, before I could strike, it vanished.

"But its venom didn't. Poor old Rowdy was dead before I could get him out of the house, but I took his corpse to Doctor Kirchoff, the veterinary, and told him Rowdy died suddenly and I wanted him to make an autopsy. He went back to his operating-room and stayed there half an hour. When he came back to the office he was wiping his glasses and wore the most astonished look I've ever seen on a human face. 'You say your dog died suddenly—in the house?' he asked.

" 'Yes,' I told him; 'just rolled over and died.'

" 'Well, bless my soul, that's the most amazing thing I ever heard!' he answered. 'I can't account for it. That dog died from snake-bite; copperhead, I'd say, and the marks of the fangs show plainly on his throat.' "

"But I thought you said it was a water moccasin," I objected. "Now Doctor Kirchoff says it was a copperhead——"

"Ah bah!" de Grandin laughed a thought unpleasantly. "Did no one ever tell you that the copperhead and moccasin are of close kind, my friend? Have not you heard some ophiologists maintain the moccasin is but a dark variety of copperhead?" He did not pause for my reply, but turned again to Ned:

"One understands your chivalry, *Monsieur*. For yourself you have no fear, since after all at times life can be bought too dearly, but the death of your small dog has put a different aspect on the matter. If this never-to-be-sufficiently-anathematized serpent which comes and goes like the *boîte à surprise*—the how do you call him? Jack from the box?—is enough a ghost thing to appear at any

time and place it wills, but sufficiently physical to exude venom which will kill a strong and healthy terrier, you have the fear for Mademoiselle Nella, *n'est-ce-pas?*"

"Precisely, you——"

"And you are well advised to have the caution, my young friend. We face a serious condition."

"What do you advise?"

The Frenchman teased his needle-point mustache-tip with a thoughtful thumb and forefinger. "For the present, nothing," he replied at length. "Let me look this situation over; let me view it from all angles. Whatever I might tell you now would probably be wrong. Suppose we meet again one week from now. By that time I should have my data well in hand."

"And in the meantime——"

"Continue to be coy with Mademoiselle Nella. Perhaps it would be well if you recalled important business which requires that you leave town till you hear from me again. There is no need to put her life in peril at this time."

"If it weren't for Kirchoff's testimony I'd say Ned Minton had gone raving crazy," I declared as the door closed on our visitors. "The whole thing's wilder than an opium smoker's dream—that meeting with the girl in New Orleans, the snake that comes and disappears, the assignation in the cemetery—it's all too preposterous. But I know Kirchoff. He's as unimaginative as a side of sole-leather, and as efficient as he is unimaginative. If he says Minton's dog died of snake-bite that's what it died of, but the whole affair's so utterly fantastic——"

"Agreed," de Grandin nodded; "but what is fantasy but the appearance of mental images as such, severed from ordinary relations? The 'ordinary relations' of images are those to which we are accustomed, which conform to our experience. The wider that experience, the more ordinary will we find extraordinary relations. By example, take yourself: You sit in a dark auditorium and see a railway train come rushing at you. Now, it is not at all in ordinary experience for a locomotive to come dashing in a theater filled with people, it is quite otherwise; but you keep your seat, you do not flinch, you are not frightened. It is nothing but a motion picture, which you understand. But if you were a savage from New Guinea you would rise and fly in panic from this steaming, shrieking iron monster which bears down on you. *Tiens*, it is a matter of experience, you see. To you it is an everyday event, to the savage it would be a new and terrifying thing.

"Or, perhaps, you are at the hospital. You place a patient between you and the Crookes' tube of an X-ray, you turn on the current, you observe him through the fluoroscope and *pouf!* his flesh all melts away and his bones spring out in sharp relief. Three hundred years ago you would have howled like a stoned dog at the sight, and prayed to be delivered from the witchcraft which produced it. Today you curse and swear like twenty drunken pirates if the Röntgenologist is but thirty seconds late in setting up the apparatus. These things are 'scientific,' you understand their underlying formulæ, therefore they seem natural. But mention what you please to call the occult, and you scoff, and that is but admitting that you are opposed to something which you do not understand. The credible and believable is that to which we are accustomed, the fantastic and incredible is what we cannot explain in terms of previous experience. *Voilà, c'est très simple, n'est-ce-pas?*"

"You mean to say you understand all this?"

"Not at all by any means; I am clever, me, but not that clever. No, my friend, I am as much in the dark as you, only I do not refuse to credit what our young friend tells us. I believe the things he has related happened, exactly as he has recounted them. I do not understand, but I believe. Accordingly, I must probe, I must sift. I must examine this matter. We see it now as a group of unrelated and irrelevant occurrences, but somewhere lies the key which will enable us to make harmony from this discord, to gather these stray, tangled threads into an ordered pattern. I go to seek that key."

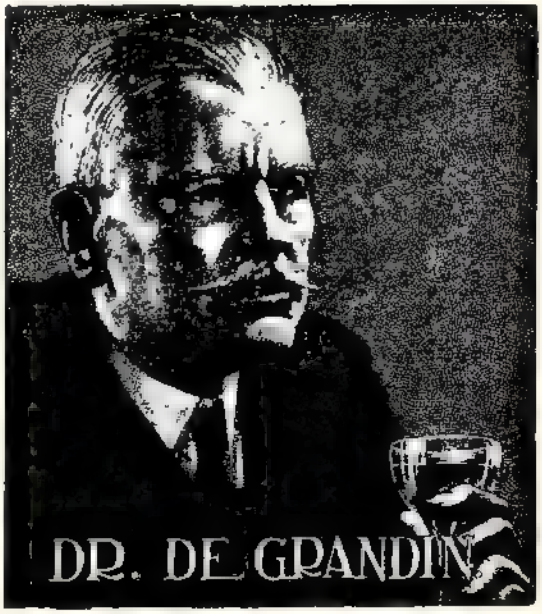
"Where?"

"To New Orleans, of course. Tonight I pack my portmanteaux, tomorrow I entrain. Just now"—he smothered a tremendous yawn—"now I do what every wise man does as often as he can. I take a drink."

SEVEN evenings later we gathered in my study, de Grandin, Ned and I, and from the little Frenchman's shining eyes I knew his quest had been productive of results.

"My friends," he told us solemnly, "I am a clever person, and a lucky one, as well. The morning after my arrival at New Orleans I enjoyed three Ramos fizzes, then went to sit in City Park by the old Dueling-Oak and wished with all my heart that I had taken four. And while I sat in self-reproachful thought, sorrowing for the drink that I had missed, behold, one passed by whom I recognized. He was my old schoolfellow, Paul Dubois, now a priest in holy orders and attached to the Cathedral of Saint Louis.

"He took me to his quarters, that good, pious man, and gave me luncheon.



It was Friday and a fast day, so we fasted. *Mon Dieu*, but we did fast! On créole gumbo and oysters à la Rockefeller, and baked pompano and little shrimp fried crisp in olive oil and chicory salad and seven different kinds of cheese and wine. When we were so filled with fasting that we could not eat another morsel my old friend took me to another priest, a native of New Orleans whose stock of local lore was second only to his marvelous capacity for fine champagne. *Morbleu*, how I admire that one! And now, attend me very carefully, my friends. What he disclosed to me makes many hidden mysteries all clear:

"In New Orleans there lived a wealthy family named d'Ayen. They possessed much gold and land, a thousand slaves or more, and one fair daughter by the name of Julie. When this country bought the Louisiana Territory from Napoléon and your army came to occupy the forts, this young girl fell in love with a young officer, a Lieutenant Philip Merriwell. *Tenez*, army love in those times was no different than it is today, it seems. This gay young lieutenant, he came, he wooed,

he won, he rode away, and little Julie wept and sighed and finally died of heartbreak. In her lovesick illness she had for constant company a slave, an old mulatress known to most as Maman Dragonne, but to Julie simply as *grand'tante*, great-aunt. She had nursed our little Julie at the breast, and all her life she fostered and attended her. To her little white '*mamselle*' she was all gentleness and kindness, but to others she was fierce and frightful, for she was a 'conjon woman,' adept at obeah, the black magic of the Congo, and among the blacks she ruled as queen by force of fear, while the whites were wont to treat her with respect and, it was more than merely whispered, retain her services upon occasion. She could sell protection to the duelist, and he who bore her charm would surely conquer on the field of honor; she brewed love-drafts which turned the hearts and heads of the most capricious coquettes or the most constant wives, as occasion warranted; by merely staring fixedly at someone she could cause him to take sick and die, and—here we commence to tread upon our own terrain—she was said to have the power of changing to a snake at will.

"Very good. You follow? When poor young Julie died of heartbreak it was old Maman Dragonne—the little white one's *grand'tante*—who watched beside her bed. It is said she stood beside her mistress' coffin and called a curse upon the fickle lover; swore he would come back and die beside the body of the sweetheart he deserted. She also made a prophecy. Julie should have many loves, but her body should not know corruption nor her spirit rest until she could find one to keep his promise and return to her with words of love upon his lips. Those who failed her should die horribly, but he who kept his pledge would bring her rest and peace. This augury she made while she stood beside her mistress' coffin just before they sealed it in the tomb in old Saint Denis Cemetery. Then she disappeared."

"You mean she ran away?" I asked.

"I mean she disappeared, vanished, evanesced, evaporated. She was never seen again, not even by the people who stood next to her when she pronounced her prophecy."

"But——"

"No buts, my friend, if you will be so kind. Years later, when the British stormed New Orleans, Lieutenant Merriwell was there with General Andrew Jackson. He survived the battle like a man whose life is charmed, though all around him comrades fell and three horses were shot under him. Then, when the strife was done, he went to the grand banquet tendered to the victors. While gayety was at its height he abruptly left the table. Next morning he was found upon the grass before the tomb of Julie d'Ayen. He was dead. He died from snake-bite.

"The years marched on and stories spread about the town, stories of a strange and lovely *belle dame sans merci*, a modern Circe who lured young gallants to their doom. Time and again some gay young blade of New Orleans would boast a conquest. Passing late at night through Royal Street, he would have a flower dropped to him as he walked underneath a balcony. He would meet a lovely girl dressed in the early Empire style, and be surprized at the ease with which he pushed his suit; then—upon the trees in Chartres Street appeared his funeral notices. He was dead, invariably he was dead of snake-bite. *Parbleu*, it got to be a saying that he who died mysteriously must have met the Lady of the Moonlight as he walked through Royal Street!"

He paused and poured a thimbleful of

brandy in his coffee. "You see?" he asked.

"No, I'm shot if I do!" I answered. "I can't see the connection between——"

"Night and breaking dawn, perhaps?" he asked sarcastically. "If two and two make four, my friend, and even you will not deny they do, then these things I have told you give an explanation of our young friend's trouble. This girl he met was most indubitably Julie, poor little Julie d'Ayen on whose tombstone it is carved: '*Ici repose malheureusement*—here lies unhappily.' The so mysterious snake which menaces young Monsieur Minton is none other than the aged Maman Dragonne—*grand'tante*, as Julie called her."

"But Ned's already failed to keep his tryst," I objected. "Why didn't this snake-woman sting him in the hotel, or——"

"Do you recall what Julie said when first the snake appeared?" he interrupted. 'Not this one, *grand'tante!*' And again, in the old cemetery when the serpent actually struck at him, she threw herself before him and received the blow. It could not permanently injure her; to earthly injuries the dead are proof, but the shock of it caused her to swoon, it seems. *Monsieur,*" he bowed to Ned, "you are more fortunate than any of those others. Several times you have been close to death, but each time you escaped. You have been given chance and chance again to keep your pledged word to the dead, a thing no other faithless lover of the little Julie ever had. It seems, Monsieur, this dead girl truly loves you."

"How horrible!" I muttered.

"You said it, Doctor Trowbridge!" Ned seconded. "It looks as if I'm in a spot, all right."

"*Mais non,*" de Grandin contradicted. "Escape is obvious, my friend."

"How, in heaven's name?"

"Keep your promised word; go back to her."

"Good Lord, I can't do that! Go back to a corpse, take her in my arms—kiss her?"

"*Certainement,* why not?"

"Why—why, she's *dead!*"

"Is she not beautiful?"

"She's lovely and alluring as a siren's song. I think she's the most exquisite thing I've ever seen, but——" he rose and walked unsteadily across the room. "If it weren't for Nella," he said slowly, "I might not find it hard to follow your advice. Julie's sweet and beautiful, and artless and affectionate as a child; kind, too, the way she stood between me and that awful snake-thing, but—oh, it's out of the question!"

"Then we must expand the question to accommodate it, my friend. For the safety of the living—for Mademoiselle Nella's sake—and for the repose of the dead, you must keep the oath you swore to little Julie d'Ayen. You must go back to New Orleans and keep your rendezvous."

THE dead of old Saint Denis lay in dreamless sleep beneath the palely argent rays of the fast-waxing moon. The oven-like tombs were gay with hardly-wilted flowers; for two days before was All Saints' Day, and no grave in all New Orleans is so lowly, no dead so long interred, that pious hands do not bear blossoms of remembrance to them on that feast of memories.

De Grandin had been busily engaged all afternoon, making mysterious trips to the old Negro quarter in company with a patriarchal scion of Indian and Negro ancestry who professed ability to guide him to the city's foremost practitioner of voodoo; returning to the hotel only

to dash out again to consult his friend at the Cathedral; coming back to stare with thoughtful eyes upon the changing panorama of Canal Street while Ned, nervous as a race-horse at the barrier, tramped up and down the room lighting cigarette from cigarette and drinking absinthe frappés alternating with sharp, bitter sazarac cocktails till I wondered that he did not fall in utter alcoholic collapse. By evening I had that eery feeling that the sane experience when alone with mad folk. I was ready to shriek at any unexpected noise or turn and run at sight of a strange shadow.

"My friend," de Grandin ordered as we reached the grass-paved corridor of tombs where Ned had told us the d'Ayen vaults were, "I suggest that you drink this." From an inner pocket he drew out a tiny flask of ruby glass and snapped its stopper loose. A strong and slightly acrid scent came to me, sweet and spicy, faintly reminiscent of the odor of the aromatic herbs one smells about a mummy's wrappings.

"Thanks, I've had enough to drink already," Ned said shortly.

"You are informing me, *mon vieux?*" the little Frenchman answered with a smile. "It is for that I brought this draft along. It will help you draw yourself together. You have need of all your faculties this time, believe me."

Ned put the bottle to his lips, drained its contents, hiccuped lightly, then braced his shoulders. "That *is* a pick-up," he complimented. "Too bad you didn't let me have it sooner, sir. I think I can go through the ordeal now."

"One is sure you can," the Frenchman answered confidently. "Walk slowly toward the spot where you last saw Julie, if you please. We shall await you here, in easy call if we are needed."

The aisle of tombs was empty as Ned left us. The turf had been fresh-mown for the day of visitation and was as smooth and short as a lawn tennis court. A field-mouse could not have run across the pathway without our seeing it. This much I noticed idly as Ned trudged away from us, walking more like a man on his way to the gallows than one who went to keep a lovers' rendezvous . . . and suddenly he was not alone. There was another with him, a girl dressed in a clinging robe of sheer white muslin cut in the charming fashion of the First Empire, girdled high beneath the bosom with a sash of light-blue ribbon. A wreath of pale gardenias lay upon her bright, fair hair; her slender arms were pearl-white in the moonlight. As she stepped toward Ned I thought involuntarily of a line from Sir John Suckling:

"Her feet . . . like little mice stole in and out."

"Édouard, chèri! O, coeur de mon coeur, c'est véritablement toi? Thou hast come willingly, unasked, *petit amant?"*

"I'm here," Ned answered steadily, "but only ——" He paused and drew a sudden gasping breath, as though a hand had been laid on his throat.

"Chèri," the girl asked in a trembling voice, "you are cold to me; do not you love me, then—you are not here because your heart heard my heart calling? O heart of my heart's heart, if you but knew how I have longed and waited! It has been *triste, mon Édouard,* lying in my narrow bed alone while winter rains and summer suns beat down, listening for your footfall. I could have gone out at my pleasure whenever moonlight made the nights all bright with silver; I could have sought for other lovers, but I would not. You held release for me within your hands, and if I might not have it from you I would forfeit it for ever. Do not you bring release for me, my Édouard? Say that it is so!"

An odd look came into the boy's face. He might have seen her for the first time, and been dazzled by her beauty and the winsome sweetness of her voice.

"Julie!" he whispered softly. "Poor, patient, faithful little Julie!"

In a single stride he crossed the intervening turf and was on his knees before her, kissing her hands, the hem of her gown, her sandaled feet, and babbling half-coherent, broken words of love.

She put her hands upon his head as if in benediction, then turned them, holding them palm-forward to his lips, finally crooked her fingers underneath his chin and raised his face. "Nay, love, sweet love, art thou a worshipper and I a saint that thou should kneel to me?" she asked him tenderly. "See, my lips are famishing for thine, and wilt thou waste thy kisses on my hands and feet and garment? Make haste, my heart, we have but little time, and I would know the kisses of redemption ere——"

They clung together in the moonlight, her white-robed, lissome form and his somberly-clad body seemed to melt and merge in one while her hands reached up to clasp his cheeks and draw his face down to her yearning, scarlet mouth.

De Grandin was reciting something in a mumbling monotone; his words were scarcely audible, but I caught a phrase occasionally: ". . . rest eternal grant to her, O Lord . . . let light eternal shine upon her . . . from the gates of hell her soul deliver . . . *Kyrie eleison* . . ."

"Julie!" we heard Ned's despairing cry, and

"*Ha*, it comes, it has begun; it finishes!" de Grandin whispered gratingly.

The girl had sunk down to the grass as though she swooned; one arm had fallen limply from Ned's shoulder, but the other still was clasped about his neck as we raced toward them. "*Adieu, mon amoureux; adieu pour ce monde, adieu pour l'autre; adieu pour l'éternité!*" we heard her sob. When we reached him, Ned knelt empty-armed before the tomb. Of Julie there was neither sign nor trace.

"So, assist him, if you will, my friend," de Grandin bade, motioning me to take Ned's elbow. "Help him to the gate. I follow quickly, but first I have a task to do."

As I led Ned, staggering like a drunken man, toward the cemetery exit, I heard the clang of metal striking metal at the tomb behind us.

"WHAT did you stop behind to do?" I asked as we prepared for bed at the hotel.

He flashed his quick, infectious smile at me, and tweaked his mustache ends, for all the world like a self-satisfied tomcat furbishing his whiskers after finishing a bowl of cream. "There was an alteration to that epitaph I had to make. You recall it read, '*Ici repo e malheuren ement* — here lies unhappily Julie d'Ayen'? That is no longer true. I chiseled off the *malheureusement*. Thanks to Monsieur Édouard's courage and my cleverness the old one's prophecy was fulfilled tonight; and poor, small Julie has found rest at last. Tomorrow morning they celebrate the first of a series of masses I have arranged for her at the Cathedral."

"What was that drink you gave Ned just before he left us?" I asked curiously. "It smelled like——"

"*Le bon Dieu* and the devil know—not I," he answered with a grin. "It was a voodoo love-potion. I found the realization that she had been dead a century and more so greatly troubled our young friend that he swore he could not be affectionate to our poor Julie; so I went down to the Negro quarter in the afternoon and arranged to have a philtre brewed. *Eh bien,* that aged black one

who concocted it assured me that she could inspire love for the image of a crocodile in the heart of anyone who looked upon it after taking but a drop of her decoction, and she charged me twenty dollars for it. But I think I had my money's worth. Did it not work marvelously?"

"Then Julie's really gone? Ned's coming back released her from the spell——"

"Not wholly gone," he corrected. "Her little body now is but a small handful of dust, her spirit is no longer earth-bound, and the familiar demon who in life was old Maman Dragonne has left the earth with her, as well. No longer will she metamorphosize into a snake and kill the faithless ones who kiss her little mistress and then forswear their troth, but—*non*, my friend. Julie is not gone entirely, I think. In the years to come when Ned and Nella have long been joined in wedded bliss, there will be minutes when Julie's face and Julie's voice and the touch of Julie's little hands will haunt his memory. There will always be one little corner of his heart which never will belong to Madame Nella Minton, for it will be for ever Julie's. Yes, I think that it is so."

Slowly, deliberately, almost ritualistically, he poured a glass of wine and raised it. "To you, my little poor one," he said softly as he looked across the sleeping city toward old Saint Denis Cemetery. "You quit earth with a kiss upon your lips; may you sleep serene in Paradise until another kiss shall waken you."

Which Will Scarcely Be Understood

By ROBERT E. HOWARD

Small poets sing of little, foolish things,
As more befitting to a shallow brain
That dreams not of the pre-Atlantean kings,
Nor launches on that dark uncharted Main
That holds grim islands and unholy tides,
Where many a black mysterious secret hides.

True rime concerns her not with bursting buds,
The chirping bird, the lifting of the rose—
Save ebon blooms that swell in ghastly woods,
And that grim, voiceless bird that ever broods
Where through black boughs a wind of horror blows.

Oh, little singers, what know you of those
Ungodly, slimy shapes that glide and crawl
Out of unreckoned gulfs when midnights fall,
To haunt the poet's slumbering, and close
Against his eyes thrust up their hissing head,
And mock him with their eyes so serpent-red?

Conceived and bred in blackened pits of hell,
The poems come that set the stars on fire;
Born of black maggots writhing in a shell
Men call a poet's skull—an iron bell
Filled up with burning mist and golden mire.

The royal purple is a moldy shroud;
The laurel crown is cypress fixed with thorns;
The sword of fame, a sickle notched and dull;
The face of beauty is a grinning skull;
And ever in their souls' red caverns loud
The rattle of the cloven hoofs and horns.

The poets know that justice is a lie,
That good and light are baubles filled with dust—
This world's slave-market where swine sell and buy,
This shambles where the howling cattle die,
Has blinded not *their* eyes with lies and lust.

Ring up the demons from the lower Pit,
Since Evil conquers goodness in the end;
Break down the Door and let the fires be lit,
And greet each slavering monster as a friend.

Let obscene shapes of Darkness ride the earth,
Let sacrificial smokes blot out the skies,
Let dying virgins glut the Black Gods' eyes,
And all the world resound with noisome mirth.

Break down the altars, let the streets run red,
Tramp down the race into the crawling slime;
Then where red Chaos lifts her serpent head,
The Fiend be praised, we'll pen the perfect rime.

The Shunned House

By H. P. LOVECRAFT

A posthumous story of immense power, written by a master of weird fiction—a tale of a revolting horror in the cellar of an old house in New England

FROM even the greatest of horrors irony is seldom absent. Sometimes it enters directly into the composition of the events, while sometimes it relates only to their fortuitous position among persons and places. The latter sort is splendidly exemplified by a case in the ancient city of Providence, where in the late forties Edgar Allan Poe used to sojourn often during his unsuccessful wooing of the gifted poetess, Mrs. Whitman. Poe generally stopped at the Mansion House in Benefit Street—the renamed Golden Ball Inn whose roof has sheltered Washington, Jefferson, and Lafayette — and his favorite walk led northward along the same street to Mrs. Whitman's home and the neighboring hillside churchyard of St. John's, whose hidden expanse of Eighteenth Century gravestones had for him a peculiar fascination.

● Howard Phillips Lovecraft died last March, at the height of his career. Though only forty-six years of age, he had built up an international reputation by the artistry and impeccable literary craftsmanship of his weird tales; and he was regarded on both sides of the Atlantic as probably the greatest contemporary master of weird fiction. His ability to create and sustain a mood of brooding dread and unnamable horror is nowhere better shown than in the posthumous tale presented here: "The Shunned House."

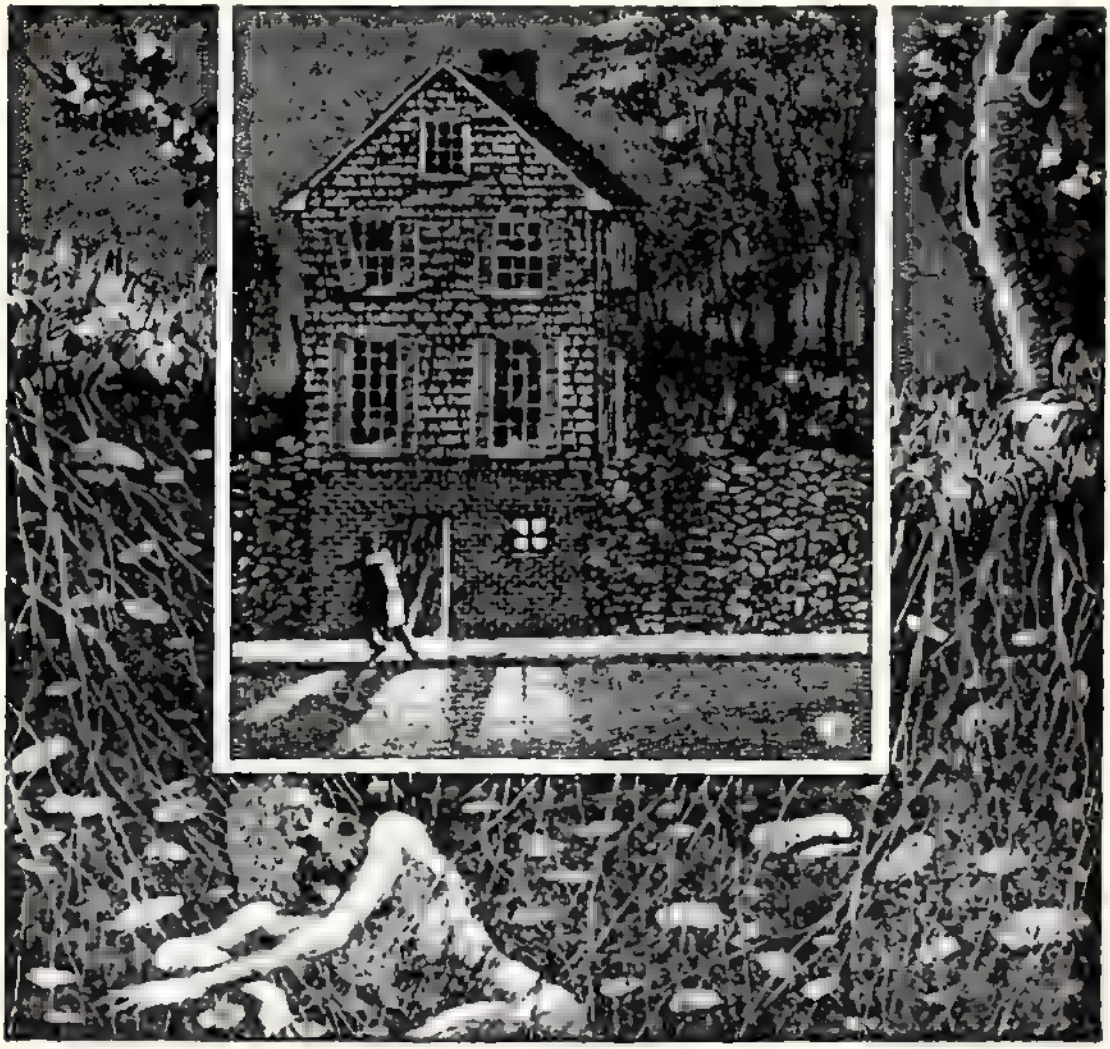
Now the irony is this. In this walk, so many times repeated, the world's greatest master of the terrible and the bizarre was obliged to pass a particular house on the eastern side of the street; a dingy, antiquated structure perched on the abruptly rising side hill, with a great unkempt yard dating from a time when the region was partly open country. It does not appear that he ever wrote or spoke of it, nor is there any evidence that he even noticed it. And yet that house, to the two persons in possession of certain information, equals or outranks in horror the wildest fantasy of the genius who so often passed it unknowingly, and stands starkly leering as a symbol of all that is unutterably hideous.

The house was—and for that matter still is—of a kind to attract the attention of the curious. Originally a farm or semi-farm building, it followed the average New England colonial lines of the middle Eighteenth Century — the prosperous peaked-roof sort, with two stories and dormerless attic, and with the Georgian doorway and interior panelling dictated by the progress of taste at that time. It faced south, with one gable end buried to the lower windows in the eastward rising hill, and the other exposed to the foundations toward the street. Its construction, over a century and a half ago, had followed the grading and straighten-

ing of the road in that especial vicinity; for Benefit Street—at first called Back Street—was laid out as a lane winding amongst the graveyards of the first settlers, and straightened only when the removal of the bodies to the North Burial Ground made it decently possible to cut through the old family plots.

At the start, the western wall had lain some twenty feet up a precipitous lawn from the roadway; but a widening of the street at about the time of the Revolution sheared off most of the intervening space, exposing the foundations so that a brick basement wall had to be made, giving the deep cellar a street frontage with door and one window above ground, close to the new line of public travel. When the sidewalk was laid out a century ago the last of the intervening space was removed; and Poe in his walks must have seen only a sheer ascent of dull gray brick flush with the sidewalk and surmounted at a height of ten feet by the antique shingled bulk of the house proper.

The farm-like ground extended back very deeply up the hill, almost to



"That awful door in Benefit Street which I had left ajar."

Wheaton Street. The space south of the house, abutting on Benefit Street, was of course greatly above the existing sidewalk level, forming a terrace bounded by a high bank wall of damp, mossy stone pierced by a steep flight of narrow steps which led inward between canyon-like surfaces to the upper region of mangy lawn, rheumy brick walks, and neglected gardens whose dismantled cement urns, rusted kettles fallen from tripods of knotty sticks, and similar paraphernalia set off the weather-beaten front door with its broken fanlight, rotting Ionic pilasters, and wormy triangular pediment.

What I heard in my youth about the shunned house was merely that people died there in alarmingly great numbers. That, I was told, was why the original owners had moved out some twenty years after building the place. It was plainly unhealthy, perhaps because of the dampness and fungous growths in the cellar, the general sickish smell, the drafts of the hallways, or the quality of the well and pump water. These things were bad enough, and these were all that gained belief among the persons whom I knew. Only the notebooks of my antiquarian uncle, Doctor Elihu Whipple, revealed to me at length the darker, vaguer surmises which formed an undercurrent of folklore among old-time servants and humble folk; surmises which never travelled far, and which were largely forgotten when Providence grew to be a metropolis with a shifting modern population.

The general fact is, that the house was never regarded by the solid part of the community as in any real sense "haunted." There were no widespread tales of rattling chains, cold currents of air, extinguished lights, or faces at the window. Extremists sometimes said the house was "unlucky," but that is as far as even they went. What was really beyond dispute is that a frightful proportion of persons died there; or more accurately, *had* died there, since after some peculiar happenings over sixty years ago the building had become deserted through the sheer impossibility of renting it. These persons were not all cut off suddenly by any one cause; rather did it seem that their vitality was insidiously sapped, so that each one died the sooner from whatever tendency to weakness he may have naturally had. And those who did not die displayed in varying degree a type of anemia or consumption, and sometimes a decline of the mental faculties, which spoke ill for the salubriousness of the building. Neighboring houses, it must be added, seemed entirely free from the noxious quality.

This much I knew before my insistent questioning led my uncle to show me the notes which finally embarked us both on our hideous investigation. In my childhood the shunned house was vacant, with barren, gnarled and terrible old trees, long, queerly pale grass and nightmarishly misshapen weeds in the high terraced yard where birds never lingered. We boys used to overrun the place, and I can still recall my youthful terror not only at the morbid strangeness of this sinister vegetation, but at the eldritch atmosphere and odor of the dilapidated house, whose unlocked front door was often entered in quest of shudders. The small-paned windows were largely broken, and a nameless air of desolation hung round the precarious panelling, shaky interior shutters, peeling wall-paper, falling plaster, rickety staircases, and such fragments of battered furniture as still remained. The dust and cobwebs added their touch of the fearful; and brave indeed was the boy who would voluntarily ascend the ladder to the attic, a vast raftered length lighted only by small blinking windows in the gable ends, and filled with a

massed wreckage of chests, chairs, and spinning-wheels which infinite years of deposit had shrouded and festooned into monstrous and hellish shapes.

But after all, the attic was not the most terrible part of the house. It was the dank, humid cellar which somehow exerted the strongest repulsion on us, even though it was wholly above ground on the street side, with only a thin door and window-pierced brick wall to separate it from the busy sidewalk. We scarcely knew whether to haunt it in spectral fascination, or to shun it for the sake of our souls and our sanity. For one thing, the bad odor of the house was strongest there; and for another thing, we did not like the white fungous growths which occasionally sprang up in rainy summer weather from the hard earth floor. Those fungi, grotesquely like the vegetation in the yard outside, were truly horrible in their outlines; detestable parodies of toadstools and Indian-pipes, whose like we had never seen in any other situation. They rotted quickly, and at one stage became slightly phosphorescent; so that nocturnal passers-by sometimes spoke of witch-fires glowing behind the broken panes of the fetor-spreading windows.

We never—even in our wildest Halloween moods — visited this cellar by night, but in some of our daytime visits could detect the phosphorescence, especially when the day was dark and wet. There was also a subtler thing we often thought we detected — a very strange thing which was, however, merely suggestive at most. I refer to a sort of cloudy whitish pattern on the dirt floor—a vague, shifting deposit of mold or niter which we sometimes thought we could trace amidst the sparse fungous growths near the huge fireplace of the basement kitchen. Once in a while it struck us that this patch bore an uncanny resemblance to a doubled-up human figure, though generally no such kinship existed, and often there was no whitish deposit whatever.

On a certain rainy afternoon when this illusion seemed phenomenally strong, and when, in addition, I had fancied I glimpsed a kind of thin, yellowish, shimmering exhalation rising from the nitrous pattern toward the yawning fireplace, I spoke to my uncle about the matter. He smiled at this odd conceit, but it seemed that his smile was tinged with reminiscence. Later I heard that a similar notion entered into some of the wild ancient tales of the common folk —a notion likewise alluding to ghoulish, wolfish shapes taken by smoke from the great chimney, and queer contours assumed by certain of the sinuous tree-roots that thrust their way into the cellar through the loose foundation-stones.

2

Not till my adult years did my uncle set before me the notes and data which he had collected concerning the shunned house. Doctor Whipple was a sane, conservative physician of the old school, and for all his interest in the place was not eager to encourage young thoughts toward the abnormal. His own view, postulating simply a building and location of markedly unsanitary qualities, had nothing to do with abnormality; but he realized that the very picturesqueness which aroused his own interest would in a boy's fanciful mind take on all manner of gruesome imaginative associations.

The doctor was a bachelor; a white-haired, clean-shaven, old-fashioned gentleman, and a local historian of note, who had often broken a lance with such controversial guardians of tradition as Sidney S. Rider and Thomas W. Bicknell. He lived with one man-servant in a Georgian homestead with knocker and iron-railed

steps, balanced eerily on the steep ascent of North Court Street beside the ancient brick court and colony house where his grandfather—a cousin of that celebrated privateersman, Captain Whipple, who burnt His Majesty's armed schooner *Gaspee* in 1772—had voted in the legislature on May 4, 1776, for the independence of the Rhode Island Colony. Around him in the damp, low-ceiled library with the musty white panelling, heavy carved overmantel and small-paned, vine-shaded windows, were the relics and records of his ancient family, among which were many dubious allusions to the shunned house in Benefit Street. That pest spot lies not far distant—for Benefit runs ledgewise just above the court house along the precipitous hill up which the first settlement climbed.

When, in the end, my insistent pestering and maturing years evoked from my uncle the hoarded lore I sought, there lay before me a strange enough chronicle. Long-winded, statistical, and drearily genealogical as some of the matter was, there ran through it a continuous thread of brooding, tenacious horror and preternatural malevolence which impressed me even more than it had impressed the good doctor. Separate events fitted together uncannily, and seemingly irrelevant details held mines of hideous possibilities. A new and burning curiosity grew in me, compared to which my boyish curiosity was feeble and inchoate.

The first revelation led to an exhaustive research, and finally to that shuddering quest which proved so disastrous to myself and mine. For at the last my uncle insisted on joining the search I had commenced, and after a certain night in that house he did not come away with me. I am lonely without that gentle soul whose long years were filled only with honor, virtue, good taste, benevolence, and learning. I have reared a marble urn to his memory in St. John's churchyard—the place that Poe loved—the hidden grove of giant willows on the hill, where tombs and headstones huddle quietly between the hoary bulk of the church and the houses and bank walls of Benefit Street.

The history of the house, opening amidst a maze of dates, revealed no trace of the sinister either about its construction or about the prosperous and honorable family who built it. Yet from the first a taint of calamity, soon increased to boding significance, was apparent. My uncle's carefully compiled record began with the building of the structure in 1763, and followed the theme with an unusual amount of detail. The shunned house, it seems, was first inhabited by William Harris and his wife Rhoby Dexter, with their children, Elkanah, born in 1755, Abigail, born in 1757, William, Jr., born in 1759, and Ruth, born in 1761. Harris was a substantial merchant and seaman in the West India trade, connected with the firm of Obadiah Brown and his nephews. After Brown's death in 1761, the new firm of Nicholas Brown & Company made him master of the brig *Prudence*, Providence-built, of 120 tons, thus enabling him to erect the new homestead he had desired ever since his marriage.

The site he had chosen—a recently straightened part of the new and fashionable Back Street, which ran along the side of the hill above crowded Cheapside—was all that could be wished, and the building did justice to the location. It was the best that moderate means could afford, and Harris hastened to move in before the birth of a fifth child which the family expected. That child, a boy, came in December; but was stillborn. Nor was any child to be born alive in that house for a century and a half.

The next April, sickness occurred

among the children, and Abigail and Ruth died before the month was over. Doctor Job Ives diagnosed the trouble as some infantile fever, though others declared it was more of a mere wasting-away or decline. It seemed, in any event, to be contagious; for Hannah Bowen, one of the two servants, died of it in the following June. Eli Lideason, the other servant, constantly complained of weakness; and would have returned to his father's farm in Rehoboth but for a sudden attachment for Mehitabel Pierce, who was hired to succeed Hannah. He died the next year—a sad year indeed, since it marked the death of William Harris himself, enfeebled as he was by the climate of Martinique, where his occupation had kept him for considerable periods during the preceding decade.

The widowed Rhoby Harris never recovered from the shock of her husband's death, and the passing of her first-born Elkanah two years later was the final blow to her reason. In 1768 she fell victim to a mild form of insanity, and was thereafter confined to the upper part of the house; her elder maiden sister, Mercy Dexter, having moved in to take charge of the family. Mercy was a plain, raw-boned woman of great strength; but her health visibly declined from the time of her advent. She was greatly devoted to her unfortunate sister, and had an especial affection for her only surviving nephew William, who from a sturdy infant had become a sickly, spindling lad. In this year the servant Mehitabel died, and the other servant, Preserved Smith, left without coherent explanation—or at least, with only some wild tales and a complaint that he disliked the smell of the place. For a time Mercy could secure no more help, since the seven deaths and case of madness, all occurring within five years' space, had begun to set in motion the body of fireside rumor which later became so bizarre. Ultimately, however, she obtained new servants from out of town; Ann White, a morose woman from that part of North Kingstown now set off as the township of Exeter, and a capable Boston man named Zenas Low.

It was Ann White who first gave definite shape to the sinister idle talk. Mercy should have known better than to hire anyone from the Nooseneck Hill country, for that remote bit of backwoods was then, as now, a seat of the most uncomfortable superstitions. As lately as 1892 an Exeter community exhumed a dead body and ceremoniously burnt its heart in order to prevent certain alleged visitations injurious to the public health and peace, and one may imagine the point of view of the same section in 1768. Ann's tongue was perniciously active, and within a few months Mercy discharged her, filling her place with a faithful and amiable Amazon from Newport, Maria Robbins.

Meanwhile poor Rhoby Harris, in her madness, gave voice to dreams and imaginings of the most hideous sort. At times her screams became insupportable, and for long periods she would utter shrieking horrors which necessitated her son's temporary residence with his cousin, Peleg Harris, in Presbyterian Lane near the new college building. The boy would seem to improve after these visits, and had Mercy been as wise as she was well-meaning, she would have let him live permanently with Peleg. Just what Mrs. Harris cried out in her fits of violence, tradition hesitates to say; or rather, presents such extravagant accounts that they nullify themselves through sheer absurdity. Certainly it sounds absurd to hear that a woman educated only in the rudiments of French often shouted for hours in a coarse and idiomatic form of that language, or that the same person, alone and

guarded, complained wildly of a staring thing which bit and chewed at her. In 1772 the servant Zenas died, and when Mrs. Harris heard of it she laughed with a shocking delight utterly foreign to her. The next year she herself died, and was laid to rest in the North Burial Ground beside her husband.

Upon the outbreak of trouble with Great Britain in 1775, William Harris, despite his scant sixteen years and feeble constitution, managed to enlist in the Army of Observation under General Greene; and from that time on enjoyed a steady rise in health and prestige. In 1780, as a captain in the Rhode Island forces in New Jersey under Colonel Angell, he met and married Phebe Hetfield of Elizabethtown, whom he brought to Providence upon his honorable discharge in the following year.

The young soldier's return was not a thing of unmitigated happiness. The house, it is true, was still in good condition; and the street had been widened and changed in name from Back Street to Benefit Street. But Mercy Dexter's once robust frame had undergone a sad and curious decay, so that she was now a stooped and pathetic figure with hollow voice and disconcerting pallor—qualities shared to a singular degree by the one remaining servant Maria. In the autumn of 1782 Phebe Harris gave birth to a still-born daughter, and on the fifteenth of the next May Mercy Dexter took leave of a useful, austere, and virtuous life.

William Harris, at last thoroughly convinced of the radically unhealthful nature of his abode, now took steps toward quitting it and closing it for ever. Securing temporary quarters for himself and his wife at the newly opened Golden Ball Inn, he arranged for the building of a new and finer house in Westminster Street, in the growing part of the town across the Great Bridge. There, in 1785, his son Dutee was born; and there the family dwelt till the encroachments of commerce drove them back across the river and over the hill to Angell Street, in the newer East Side residence district, where the late Archer Harris built his sumptuous but hideous French-roofed mansion in 1876. William and Phebe both succumbed to the yellow fever epidemic of 1797, but Dutee was brought up by his cousin Rathbone Harris, Peleg's son.

Rathbone was a practical man, and rented the Benefit Street house despite William's wish to keep it vacant. He considered it an obligation to his ward to make the most of all the boy's property, nor did he concern himself with the deaths and illnesses which caused so many changes of tenants, or the steadily growing aversion with which the house was generally regarded. It is likely that he felt only vexation when, in 1804, the town council ordered him to fumigate the place with sulfur, tar, and gum camphor on account of the much-discussed deaths of four persons, presumably caused by the then diminishing fever epidemic. They said the place had a febrile smell.

Dutee himself thought little of the house, for he grew up to be a privateersman, and served with distinction on the *Vigilant* under Captain Cahoone in the War of 1812. He returned unharmed, married in 1814, and became a father on that memorable night of September 23, 1815, when a great gale drove the waters of the bay over half the town, and floated a tall sloop well up Westminster Street so that its masts almost tapped the Harris windows in symbolic affirmation that the new boy, Welcome, was a seaman's son.

Welcome did not survive his father, but lived to perish gloriously at Fredericksburg in 1862. Neither he nor his son Archer knew of the shunned house as other than a nuisance almost impos-

sible to rent—perhaps on account of the mustiness and sickly odor of unkempt old age. Indeed, it never was rented after a series of deaths culminating in 1861, which the excitement of the war tended to throw into obscurity. Carrington Harris, last of the male line, knew it only as a deserted and somewhat picturesque center of legend until I told him my experience. He had meant to tear it down and build an apartment house on the site, but after my account decided to let it stand, install plumbing, and rent it. Nor has he yet had any difficulty in obtaining tenants. The horror has gone.

3

It may well be imagined how powerfully I was affected by the annals of the Harrises. In this continuous record there seemed to me to brood a persistent evil beyond anything in nature as I had known it; an evil clearly connected with the house and not with the family. This impression was confirmed by my uncle's less systematic array of miscellaneous data—legends transcribed from servant gossip, cuttings from the papers, copies of death certificates by fellow-physicians, and the like. All of this material I cannot hope to give, for my uncle was a tireless antiquarian and very deeply interested in the shunned house; but I may refer to several dominant points which earn notice by their recurrence through many reports from diverse sources. For example, the servant gossip was practically unanimous in attributing to the fungous and malodorous *cellar* of the house a vast supremacy in evil influence. There had been servants—Ann White especially—who would not use the cellar kitchen, and at least three well-defined legends bore upon the queer quasi-human or diabolic outlines assumed by tree-roots and patches of mold in that region. These latter narratives interested me profoundly, on account of what I had seen in my boyhood, but I felt that most of the significance had in each case been largely obscured by additions from the common stock of local ghost lore.

Ann White, with her Exeter superstition, had promulgated the most extravagant and at the same time most consistent tale; alleging that there must lie buried beneath the house one of those vampires—the dead who retain their bodily form and live on the blood or breath of the living—whose hideous legions send their preying shapes or spirits abroad by night. To destroy a vampire one must, the grandmothers say, exhume it and burn its heart, or at least drive a stake through that organ; and Ann's dogged insistence on a search under the cellar had been prominent in bringing about her discharge.

Her tales, however, commanded a wide audience, and were the more readily accepted because the house indeed stood on land once used for burial purposes. To me their interest depended less on this circumstance than on the peculiarly appropriate way in which they dovetailed with certain other things—the complaint of the departing servant Preserved Smith, who had preceded Ann and never heard of her, that something "sucked his breath" at night; the death-certificates of the fever victims of 1804, issued by Doctor Chad Hopkins, and showing the four deceased persons all unaccountably lacking in blood; and the obscure passages of poor Rhoby Harris's ravings, where she complained of the sharp teeth of a glassy-eyed, half-visible presence

Free from unwarranted superstitition though I am, these things produced in me an odd sensation, which was intensified by a pair of widely separated newspaper cuttings relating to deaths in the shunned house—one from the *Providence*

Gazette and Country-Journal of April 12, 1815, and the other from the *Daily Transcript and Chronicle* of October 27, 1845—each of which detailed an appallingly grisly circumstance whose duplication was remarkable. It seems that in both instances the dying person, in 1815 a gentle old lady named Stafford and in 1845 a schoolteacher of middle age named Eleazar Durfee, became transfigured in a horrible way, glaring glassily and attempting to bite the throat of the attending physician. Even more puzzling, though, was the final case which put an end to the renting of the house—a series of anemia deaths preceded by progressive madnesses wherein the patient would craftily attempt the lives of his relatives by incisions in the neck or wrist.

This was in 1860 and 1861, when my uncle had just begun his medical practise; and before leaving for the front he heard much of it from his elder professional colleagues. The really inexplicable thing was the way in which the victims—ignorant people, for the ill-smelling and widely shunned house could now be rented to no others — would babble maledictions in French, a language they could not possibly have studied to any extent. It made one think of poor Rhoby Harris nearly a century before, and so moved my uncle that he commenced collecting historical data on the house after listening, some time subsequent to his return from the war, to the first-hand account of Doctors Chase and Whitmarsh. Indeed, I could see that my uncle had thought deeply on the subject, and that he was glad of my own interest—an open-minded and sympathetic interest which enabled him to discuss with me matters at which others would merely have laughed. His fancy had not gone so far as mine, but he felt that the place was rare in its imaginative potentialities, and worthy of note as an inspiration in the field of the grotesque and macabre.

For my part, I was disposed to take the whole subject with profound seriousness, and began at once not only to review the evidence, but to accumulate as much more as I could. I talked with the elderly Archer Harris, then owner of the house, many times before his death in 1916; and obtained from him and his still surviving maiden sister Alice an authentic corroboration of all the family data my uncle had collected. When, however, I asked them what connection with France or its language the house could have, they confessed themselves as frankly baffled and ignorant as I. Archer knew nothing, and all that Miss Harris could say was that an old allusion her grandfather, Dutee Harris, had heard of might have shed a little light. The old seaman, who had survived his son Welcome's death in battle by two years, had not himself known the legend, but recalled that his earliest nurse, the ancient Maria Robbins, seemed darkly aware of something that might have lent a weird significance to the French raving of Rhoby Harris, which she had so often heard during the last days of that hapless woman. Maria had been at the shunned house from 1769 till the removal of the family in 1783, and had seen Mercy Dexter die. Once she hinted to the child Dutee of a somewhat peculiar circumstance in Mercy's last moments, but he had soon forgotten all about it save that it was something peculiar. The granddaughter, moreover, recalled even this much with difficulty. She and her brother were not so much interested in the house as was Archer's son Carrington, the present owner, with whom I talked after my experience.

HAVING exhausted the Harris family of all the information it could furnish, I turned my attention to early town

records and deeds with a zeal more penetrating than that which my uncle had occasionally shown in the same work. What I wished was a comprehensive history of the site from its very settlement in 1636—or even before, if any Narragansett Indian legend could be unearthed to supply the data. I found, at the start, that the land had been part of the long strip of home lot granted originally to John Throckmorton; one of many similar strips beginning at the Town Street beside the river and extending up over the hill to a line roughly corresponding with the modern Hope Street. The Throckmorton lot had later, of course, been much subdivided; and I became very assiduous in tracing that section through which Back or Benefit Street was later run. It had, as rumor indeed said, been the Throckmorton graveyard; but as I examined the records more carefully, I found that the graves had all been transferred at an early date to the North Burial Ground on the Pawtucket West Road.

Then suddenly I came—by a rare piece of chance, since it was not in the main body of records and might easily have been missed—upon something which aroused my keenest eagerness, fitting in as it did with several of the queerest phases of the affair. It was the record of a lease, in 1697, of a small tract of ground to an Etienne Roulet and wife. At last the French element had appeared—that, and another deeper element of horror which the name conjured up from the darkest recesses of my weird and heterogeneous reading—and I feverishly studied the platting of the locality as it had been before the cutting through and partial straightening of Back Street between 1747 and 1758. I found what I had half expected, that where the shunned house now stood the Roulets had laid out their graveyard behind a one-story and attic cottage, and that no record of any transfer of graves existed. The document, indeed, ended in much confusion; and I was forced to ransack both the Rhode Island Historical Society and Shepley Library before I could find a local door which the name of Etienne Roulet would unlock. In the end I did find something; something of such vague but monstrous import that I set about at once to examine the cellar of the shunned house itself with a new and excited minuteness.

The Roulets, it seemed, had come in 1696 from East Greenwich, down the west shore of Narragansett Bay. They were Huguenots from Canude, and had encountered much opposition before the Providence selectmen allowed them to settle in the town. Unpopularity had dogged them in East Greenwich, whither they had come in 1686, after the revocation of the Edict of Nantes, and rumor said that the cause of dislike extended beyond mere racial and national prejudice, or the land disputes which involved other French settlers with the English in rivalries which not even Governor Andros could quell. But their ardent Protestantism—too ardent, some whispered — and their evident distress when virtually driven from the village down the bay, had moved the sympathy of the town fathers. Here the strangers had been granted a haven; and the swarthy Etienne Roulet, less apt at agriculture than at reading queer books and drawing queer diagrams, was given a clerical post in the warehouse at Pardon Tillinghast's wharf, far south in Town Street. There had, however, been a riot of some sort later on—perhaps forty years later, after old Roulet's death—and no one seemed to hear of the family after that.

For a century and more, it appeared, the Roulets had been well remembered and frequently discussed as vivid inci-

dents in the quiet life of a New England seaport. Etienne's son Paul, a surly fellow whose erratic conduct had probably provoked the riot which wiped out the family, was particularly a source of speculation; and though Providence never shared the witchcraft panics of her Puritan neighbors, it was freely intimated by old wives that his prayers were neither uttered at the proper time nor directed toward the proper object. All this had undoubtedly formed the basis of the legend known by old Maria Robbins. What relation it had to the French ravings of Rhoby Harris and other inhabitants of the shunned house, imagination or future discovery alone could determine. I wondered how many of those who had known the legends realized that additional link with the terrible which my wider reading had given me; that ominous item in the annals of morbid horror which tells of the creature *Jacques Roulet, of Caude*, who in 1598 was condemned to death as a demoniac but afterward saved from the stake by the Paris parliament and shut in a madhouse. He had been found covered with blood and shreds of flesh in a wood, shortly after the killing and rending of a boy by a pair of wolves. One wolf was seen to lope away unhurt. Surely a pretty hearthside tale, with a queer significance as to name and place; but I decided that the Providence gossips could not have generally known of it. Had they known, the coincidence of names would have brought some drastic and frightened action—indeed, might not its limited whispering have precipitated the final riot which erased the Roulets from the town?

I NOW visited the accursed place with increased frequency; studying the unwholesome vegetation of the garden, examining all the walls of the building, and poring over every inch of the earthen cellar floor. Finally, with Carrington Harris's permission, I fitted a key to the disused door opening from the cellar directly upon Benefit Street, preferring to have a more immediate access to the outside world than the dark stairs, ground-floor hall, and front door could give. There, where morbidity lurked most thickly, I searched and poked during long afternoons when the sunlight filtered in through the cobwebbed above-ground windows, and a sense of security glowed from the unlocked door which placed me only a few feet from the placid sidewalk outside. Nothing new rewarded my efforts—only the same depressing mustiness and faint suggestions of noxious odors and nitrous outlines on the floor—and I fancy that many pedestrians must have watched me curiously through the broken panes.

At length, upon a suggestion of my uncle's, I decided to try the spot nocturnally; and one stormy midnight ran the beams of an electric torch over the moldy floor with its uncanny shapes and distorted, half-phosphorescent fungi. The place had dispirited me curiously that evening, and I was almost prepared when I saw—or thought I saw—amidst the whitish deposits a particularly sharp definition of the "huddled form" I had suspected from boyhood. Its clearness was astonishing and unprecedented—and as I watched I seemed to see again the thin, yellowish, shimmering exhalation which had startled me on that rainy afternoon so many years before.

Above the anthropomorphic patch of mold by the fireplace it rose; a subtle, sickish, almost luminous vapor which as it hung trembling in the dampness seemed to develop vague and shocking suggestions of form, gradually trailing off into nebulous decay and passing up into the blackness of the great chimney with a fetor in its wake. It was truly horrible,

and the more so to me because of what I knew of the spot. Refusing to flee, I watched it fade—and as I watched I felt that it was in turn watching me greedily with eyes more imaginable than visible. When I told my uncle about it he was greatly aroused; and after a tense hour of reflection, arrived at a definite and drastic decision. Weighing in his mind the importance of the matter, and the significance of our relation to it, he insisted that we both test—and if possible destroy—the horror of the house by a joint night or nights of aggressive vigil in that musty and fungus-cursed cellar.

4

On Wednesday, June 25, 1919, after a proper notification of Carrington Harris which did not include surmises as to what we expected to find, my uncle and I conveyed to the shunned house two camp chairs and a folding camp cot, together with some scientific mechanism of greater weight and intricacy. These we placed in the cellar during the day, screening the windows with paper and planning to return in the evening for our first vigil. We had locked the door from the cellar to the ground floor; and having a key to the outside cellar door, were prepared to leave our expensive and delicate apparatus—which we had obtained secretly and at great cost—as many days as our vigils might be protracted. It was our design to sit up together till very late, and then watch singly till dawn in two-hour stretches, myself first and then my companion; the inactive member resting on the cot.

The natural leadership with which my uncle procured the instruments from the laboratories of Brown University and the Cranston Street Armory, and instinctively assumed direction of our venture, was a marvelous commentary on the potential vitality and resilience of a man of eighty-one. Elihu Whipple had lived according to the hygienic laws he had preached as a physician, and but for what happened later would be here in full vigor today. Only two persons suspected what did happen—Carrington Harris and myself. I had to tell Harris because he owned the house and deserved to know what had gone out of it. Then too, we had spoken to him in advance of our quest; and I felt after my uncle's going that he would understand and assist me in some vitally necessary public explanations. He turned very pale, but agreed to help me, and decided that it would now be safe to rent the house.

To declare that we were not nervous on that rainy night of watching would be an exaggeration both gross and ridiculous. We were not, as I have said, in any sense childishly superstitious, but scientific study and reflection had taught us that the known universe of three dimensions embraces the merest fraction of the whole cosmos of substance and energy. In this case an overwhelming preponderance of evidence from numerous authentic sources pointed to the tenacious existence of certain forces of great power and, so far as the human point of view is concerned, exceptional malignancy. To say that we actually believed in vampires or werewolves would be a carelessly inclusive statement. Rather must it be said that we were not prepared to deny the possibility of certain unfamiliar and unclassified modifications of vital force and attenuated matter; existing very infrequently in three-dimensional space because of its more intimate connection with other spatial units, yet close enough to the boundary of our own to furnish us occasional manifestations which we, for lack of a proper vantage-point, may never hope to understand.

In short, it seemed to my uncle and

me that an incontrovertible array of facts pointed to some lingering influence in the shunned house; traceable to one or another of the ill-favored French settlers of two centuries before, and still operative through rare and unknown laws of atomic and electronic motion. That the family of Roulet had possessed an abnormal affinity for outer circles of entity —dark spheres which for normal folk hold only repulsion and terror—their recorded history seemed to prove. Had not, then, the riots of those bygone seventeen-thirties set moving certain kinetic patterns in the morbid brain of one or more of them—notably the sinister Paul Roulet—which obscurely survived the bodies murdered and buried by the mob, and continued to function in some multiple-dimensioned space along the original lines of force determined by a frantic hatred of the encroaching community?

Such a thing was surely not a physical or biochemical impossibility in the light of a newer science which includes the theories of relativity and intra-atomic action. One might easily imagine an alien nucleus of substance or energy, formless or otherwise, kept alive by imperceptible or immaterial subtractions from the life-force or bodily tissue and fluids of other and more palpably living things into which it penetrates and with whose fabric it sometimes completely merges itself. It might be actively hostile, or it might be dictated merely by blind motives of self-preservation. In any case such a monster must of necessity be in our scheme of things an anomaly and an intruder, whose extirpation forms a primary duty with every man not an enemy to the world's life, health, and sanity.

What baffled us was our utter ignorance of the aspect in which we might encounter the thing. No sane person had ever seen it, and few had ever felt it definitely. It might be pure energy—a form ethereal and outside the realm of substance—or it might be partly material; some unknown and equivocal mass of plasticity, capable of changing at will to nebulous approximations of the solid, liquid, gaseous, or tenuously unparticled states. The anthropomorphic patch of mold on the floor, the form of the yellowish vapor, and the curvature of the tree-roots in some of the old tales, all argued at least a remote and reminiscent connection with the human shape; but how representative or permanent that similarity might be, none could say with any kind of certainty.

We had devised two weapons to fight it; a large and specially fitted Crookes tube operated by powerful storage batteries and provided with peculiar screens and reflectors, in case it proved intangible and opposable only by vigorously destructive ether radiations, and a pair of military flame-throwers of the sort used in the World War, in case it proved partly material and susceptible of mechanical destruction—for like the superstitious Exeter rustics, we were prepared to burn the thing's heart out if heart existed to burn. All this aggressive mechanism we set in the cellar in positions carefully arranged with reference to the cot and chairs, and to the spot before the fireplace where the mold had taken strange shapes. That suggestive patch, by the way, was only faintly visible when we placed our furniture and instruments, and when we returned that evening for the actual vigil. For a moment I half doubted that I had ever seen it in the more definitely limned form—but then I thought of the legends.

Our cellar vigil began at ten p. m., daylight saving time, and as it continued we found no promise of pertinent developments. A weak, filtered glow from the rain-harassed street-lamps outside, and a

feeble phosphorescence from the detestable fungi within, showed the dripping stone of the walls, from which all traces of whitewash had vanished; the dank, fetid and mildew-tainted hard earth floor with its obscene fungi; the rotting remains of what had been stools, chairs, and tables, and other more shapeless furniture; the heavy planks and massive beams of the ground floor overhead; the decrepit plank door leading to bins and chambers beneath other parts of the house; the crumbling stone staircase with ruined wooden hand-rail; and the crude and cavernous fireplace of blackened brick where rusted iron fragments revealed the past presence of hooks, andirons, spit, crane, and a door to the Dutch oven—these things, and our austere cot and camp chairs, and the heavy and intricate destructive machinery we had brought.

We had, as in my own former explorations, left the door to the street unlocked; so that a direct and practical path of escape might lie open in case of manifestations beyond our power to deal with. It was our idea that our continued nocturnal presence would call forth whatever malign entity lurked there; and that being prepared, we could dispose of the thing with one or the other of our provided means as soon as we had recognized and observed it sufficiently. How long it might require to evoke and extinguish the thing, we had no notion. It occurred to us, too, that our venture was far from safe; for in what strength the thing might appear no one could tell. But we deemed the game worth the hazard, and embarked on it alone and unhesitatingly; conscious that the seeking of outside aid would only expose us to ridicule and perhaps defeat our entire purpose. Such was our frame of mind as we talked—far into the night, till my uncle's growing drowsiness made me remind him to lie down for his two-hour sleep.

Something like fear chilled me as I sat there in the small hours alone—I say alone, for one who sits by a sleeper is indeed alone; perhaps more alone than he can realize. My uncle breathed heavily, his deep inhalations and exhalations accompanied by the rain outside, and punctuated by another nerve-racking sound of distant dripping water within—for the house was repulsively damp even in dry weather, and in this storm positively swamp-like. I studied the loose, antique masonry of the walls in the fungus-light and the feeble rays which stole in from the street through the screened window; and once, when the noisome atmosphere of the place seemed about to sicken me, I opened the door and looked up and down the street, feasting my eyes on familiar sights and my nostrils on wholesome air. Still nothing occurred to reward my watching; and I yawned repeatedly, fatigue getting the better of apprehension.

Then the stirring of my uncle in his sleep attracted my notice. He had turned restlessly on the cot several times during the latter half of the first hour, but now he was breathing with unusual irregularity, occasionally heaving a sigh which held more than a few of the qualities of a choking moan.

I turned my electric flashlight on him and found his face averted; so rising and crossing to the other side of the cot, I again flashed the light to see if he seemed in any pain. What I saw unnerved me most surprizingly, considering its relative triviality. It must have been merely the association of any odd circumstance with the sinister nature of our location and mission, for surely the circumstance was not in itself frightful or unnatural. It was merely that my uncle's facial expression, disturbed no doubt by the strange

dreams which our situation prompted, betrayed considerable agitation, and seemed not at all characteristic of him. His habitual expression was one of kindly and well-bred calm, whereas now a variety of emotions seemed struggling within him. I think, on the whole, that it was this *variety* which chiefly disturbed me. My uncle, as he gasped and tossed in increasing perturbation and with eyes that had now started open, seemed not one but many men, and suggested a curious quality of alienage from himself.

All at once he commenced to mutter, and I did not like the look of his mouth and teeth as he spoke. The words were at first indistinguishable, and then —with a tremendous start—I recognized something about them which filled me with icy fear till I recalled the breadth of my uncle's education and the interminable translations he had made from anthropological and antiquarian articles in the *Revue des Deux Mondes*. For the venerable Elihu Whipple was muttering *in French*, and the few phrases I could distinguish seemed connected with the darkest myths he had ever adapted from the famous Paris magazine.

Suddenly a perspiration broke out on the sleeper's forehead, and he leaped abruptly up, half awake. The jumble of French changed to a cry in English, and the hoarse voice shouted excitedly, "My breath, my breath!" Then the awakening became complete, and with a subsidence of facial expression to the normal state my uncle seized my hand and began to relate a dream whose nucleus of significance I could only surmise with a kind of awe.

He had, he said, floated off from a very ordinary series of dream-pictures into a scene whose strangeness was related to nothing he had ever read. It was of this world, and yet not of it—a shadowy geometrical confusion in which could be seen elements of familiar things in most unfamiliar and perturbing combinations. There was a suggestion of queerly disordered pictures superimposed one upon another; an arrangement in which the essentials of time as well as of space seemed dissolved and mixed in the most illogical fashion. In this kaleidoscopic vortex of phantasmal images were occasional snap-shots, if one might use the term, of singular clearness but unaccountable heterogeneity.

Once my uncle thought he lay in a carelessly dug open pit, with a crowd of angry faces framed by straggling locks and three-cornered hats frowning down on him. Again he seemed to be in the interior of a house—an old house, apparently—but the details and inhabitants were constantly changing, and he could never be certain of the faces or the furniture, or even of the room itself, since doors and windows seemed in just as great a state of flux as the presumably more mobile objects. It was queer—damnably queer—and my uncle spoke almost sheepishly, as if half expecting not to be believed, when he declared that of the strange faces many had unmistakably borne the features of the Harris family. And all the while there was a personal sensation of choking, as if some pervasive presence had spread itself through his body and sought to possess itself of his vital processes.

I shuddered at the thought of those vital processes, worn as they were by eighty-one years of continuous functioning, in conflict with unknown forces of which the youngest and strongest system might well be afraid; but in another moment reflected that dreams are only dreams, and that these uncomfortable visions could be, at most, no more than my uncle's reaction to the investigations

and expectations which had lately filled our minds to the exclusion of all else.

Conversation, also, soon tended to dispel my sense of strangeness; and in time I yielded to my yawns and took my turn at slumber. My uncle seemed now very wakeful, and welcomed his period of watching even though the nightmare had aroused him far ahead of his alotted two hours.

Sleep seized me quickly, and I was at once haunted with dreams of the most disturbing kind. I felt, in my visions, a cosmic and abysmal loneness; with hostility surging from all sides upon some prison where I lay confined. I seemed bound and gagged, and taunted by the echoing yells of distant multitudes who thirsted for my blood. My uncle's face came to me with less pleasant association than in waking hours, and I recall many futile struggles and attempts to scream. It was not a pleasant sleep, and for a second I was not sorry for the echoing shriek which clove through the barriers of dream and flung me to a sharp and startled awakeness in which every actual object before my eyes stood out with more than natural clearness and reality.

5

I HAD been lying with my face away from my uncle's chair, so that in this sudden flash of awakening I saw only the door to the street, the window, and the wall and floor and ceiling toward the north of the room, all photographed with morbid vividness on my brain in a light brighter than the glow of the fungi or the rays from the street outside. It was not a strong or even a fairly strong light; certainly not nearly strong enough to read an average book by. But it cast a shadow of myself and the cot on the floor, and had a yellowish, penetrating force that hinted at things more potent than luminosity. This I perceived with unhealthy sharpness despite the fact that two of my other senses were violently assailed. For on my ears rang the reverberations of that shocking scream, while my nostrils revolted at the stench which filled the place. My mind, as alert as my senses, recognized the gravely unusual; and almost automatically I leaped up and turned about to grasp the destructive instruments which we had left trained on the moldy spot before the fireplace. As I turned, I dreaded what I was to see; for the scream had been in my uncle's voice, and I knew not against what menace I should have to defend him and myself.

Yet after all, the sight was worse than I had dreaded. There are horrors beyond horrors, and this was one of those nuclei of all dreamable hideousness which the cosmos saves to blast an accursed and unhappy few. Out of the fungus-ridden earth steamed up a vaporous corpse-light, yellow and diseased, which bubbled and lapped to a gigantic height in vague outlines half human and half monstrous, through which I could see the chimney and fireplace beyond. It was all eyes—wolfish and mocking—and the rugose insect-like head dissolved at the top to a thin stream of mist which curled putridly about and finally vanished up the chimney. I say that I saw this thing, but it is only in conscious retrospection that I ever definitely traced its damnable approach to form. At the time, it was to me only a seething, dimly phosphorescent cloud of fungous loathsomeness, enveloping and dissolving to an abhorrent plasticity the one object on which all my attention was focussed. That object was my uncle—the venerable Elihu Whipple—who with blackening and decaying features leered and gibbered at me, and reached out dripping claws to rend me in the fury which this horror had brought.

It was a sense of routine which kept me from going mad. I had drilled myself in preparation for the crucial moment, and blind training saved me. Recognizing the bubbling evil as no substance reachable by matter or material chemistry, and therefore ignoring the flame-thrower which loomed on my left, I threw on the current of the Crookes tube apparatus, and focussed toward that scene of immortal blasphemousness the strongest ether radiations which man's art can arouse from the spaces and fluids of nature. There was a bluish haze and a frenzied sputtering, and the yellowish phosphorescence grew dimmer to my eyes. But I saw the dimness was only that of contrast, and that the waves from the machine had no effect whatever.

Then, in the midst of that demoniac spectacle, I saw a fresh horror which brought cries to my lips and sent me fumbling and staggering toward that unlocked door to the quiet street, careless of what abnormal terrors I loosed upon the world, or what thoughts or judgments of men I brought down upon my head. In that dim blend of blue and yellow the form of my uncle had commenced a nauseous liquefaction whose essence eludes all description, and in which there played across his vanishing face such changes of identity as only madness can conceive. He was at once a devil and a multitude, a charnel-house and a pageant. Lit by the mixed and uncertain beams, that gelatinous face assumed a dozen—a score—a hundred—aspects; grinning, as it sank to the ground on a body that melted like tallow, in the caricatured likeness of legions strange and yet not strange.

I saw the features of the Harris line, masculine and feminine, adult and infantile, and other features old and young, coarse and refined, familiar and unfamiliar. For a second there flashed a degraded counterfeit of a miniature of poor mad Rhoby Harris that I had seen in the School of Design museum, and another time I thought I caught the raw-boned image of Mercy Dexter as I recalled her from a painting in Carrington Harris's house. It was frightful beyond conception; toward the last, when a curious blend of servant and baby visages flickered close to the fungous floor where a pool of greenish grease was spreading, it seemed as though the shifting features fought against themselves and strove to form contours like those of my uncle's kindly face. I like to think that he existed at that moment. and that he tried to bid me farewell. It seems to me I hiccupped a farewell from my own parched throat as I lurched out into the street; a thin stream of grease following me through the door to the rain-drenched sidewalk.

The rest is shadowy and monstrous. There was no one in the soaking street, and in all the world there was no one I dared tell. I walked aimlessly south past College Hill and the Athenæum, down Hopkins Street, and over the bridge to the business section where tall buildings seemed to guard me as modern material things guard the world from ancient and unwholesome wonder. Then gray dawn unfolded wetly from the east, silhouetting the archaic hill and its venerable steeples, and beckoning me to the place where my terrible work was still unfinished. And in the end I went. wet, hatless, and dazed in the morning light, and entered that awful door in Benefit Street which I had left ajar, and which still swung cryptically in full sight of the early householders to whom I dared not speak.

The grease was gone, for the moldy floor was porous. And in front of the fireplace was no vestige of the giant dou-

bled-up form traced in niter. I looked at the cot, the chairs, the instruments, my neglected hat, and the yellowed straw hat of my uncle. Dazedness was uppermost, and I could scarcely recall what was dream and what was reality. Then thought trickled back, and I knew that I had witnessed things more horrible than I had dreamed.

Sitting down, I tried to conjecture as nearly as sanity would let me just what had happened, and how I might end the horror, if indeed it had been real. Matter it seemed not to be, nor ether, nor anything else conceivable by mortal mind. What, then, but some exotic *emanation:* some vampirish vapor such as Exeter rustics tell of as lurking over certain churchyards? This I felt was the clue, and again I looked at the floor before the fireplace where the mold and niter had taken strange forms.

In ten minutes my mind was made up, and taking my hat I set out for home, where I bathed, ate, and gave by telephone an order for a pickax, a spade, a military gas-mask, and six carboys of sulfuric acid, all to be delivered the next morning at the cellar door of the shunned house in Benefit Street. After that I tried to sleep; and failing, passed the hours in reading and in the composition of inane verses to counteract my mood.

At eleven a. m. the next day I commenced digging. It was sunny weather, and I was glad of that. I was still alone, for as much as I feared the unknown horror I sought, there was more fear in the thought of telling anybody. Later I told Harris only through sheer necessity, and because he had heard odd tales from old people which disposed him ever so little toward belief. As I turned up the stinking black earth in front of the fireplace, my spade causing a viscous yellow ichor to ooze from the white fungi which it severed, I trembled at the dubious thoughts of what I might uncover. Some secrets of inner earth are not good for mankind, and this seemed to me one of them.

My hand shook perceptibly, but still I delved; after a while standing in the large hole I had made. With the deepening of the hole, which was about six feet square, the evil smell increased; and I lost all doubt of my imminent contact with the hellish thing whose emanations had cursed the house for over a century and a half. I wondered what it would look like—what its form and substance would be, and how big it might have waxed through long ages of life-sucking. At length I climbed out of the hole and dispersed the heaped-up dirt, then arranging the great carboys of acid around and near two sides, so that when necessary I might empty them all down the aperture in quick succession. After that I dumped earth only along the other two sides; working more slowly and donning my gas-mask as the smell grew. I was nearly unnerved at my proximity to a nameless thing at the bottom of a pit.

Suddenly my spade struck something softer than earth. I shuddered, and made a motion as if to climb out of the hole, which was now as deep as my neck. Then courage returned, and I scraped away more dirt in the light of the electric torch I had provided. The surface I uncovered was fishy and glassy—a kind of semi-putrid congealed jelly with suggestions of translucency. I scraped further, and saw that it had form. There was a rift where a part of the substance was folded over. The exposed area was huge and roughly cylindrical; like a mammoth soft blue-white stovepipe doubled in two, its largest part some two feet in diameter. Still more I scraped, and then abruptly I

leaped out of the hole and away from the filthy thing; frantically unstopping and tilting the heavy carboys, and precipitating their corrosive contents one after another down that charnel gulf and upon the unthinkable abnormality whose titan *elbow* I had seen.

THE blinding maelstrom of greenish-yellow vapor which surged tempestuously up from that hole as the floods of acid descended, will never leave my memory. All along the hill people tell of the yellow day, when virulent and horrible fumes arose from the factory waste dumped in the Providence River, but I know how mistaken they are as to the source. They tell, too, of the hideous roar which at the same time came from some disordered water-pipe or gas main underground—but again I could correct them if I dared. It was unspeakably shocking, and I do not see how I lived through it. I did faint after emptying the fourth carboy, which I had to handle after the fumes had began to penetrate my mask; but when I recovered I saw that the hole was emitting no fresh vapors.

The two remaining carboys I emptied down without particular result, and after a time I felt it safe to shovel the earth back into the pit. It was twilight before I was done, but fear had gone out of the place. The dampness was less fetid, and all the strange fungi had withered to a kind of harmless grayish powder which blew ash-like along the floor. One of earth's nethermost terrors had perished for ever; and if there be a hell, it had received at last the demon soul of an unhallowed thing. And as I patted down the last spadeful of mold, I shed the first of the many tears with which I have paid unaffected tribute to my beloved uncle's memory.

The next spring no more pale grass and strange weeds came up in the shunned house's terraced garden, and shortly afterward Carrington Harris rented the place. It is still spectral, but its strangeness fascinates me, and I shall find mixed with my relief a queer regret when it is torn down to make way for a tawdry shop or vulgar apartment building. The barren old trees in the yard have begun to bear small, sweet apples, and last year the birds nested in their gnarled boughs.

"Then I heard him in the hallway and on the stairs."

The Homicidal Diary

By EARL PEIRCE, JR.

What strange compulsion drove an ordinarily gentle and cultured man, on one night of each week, to roam the city streets and commit a ghastly crime?

I AM writing this account of my friend Jason Carse in the interests of both justice and psychiatry, and perhaps of demonology as well. There is no greater proof of what I relate than the sequence of murders which so recently shocked this city, the newspaper items regarding the crimes, and especially the official report of the alienists who examined Carse during his trial. I cannot expect to bring Doctor Carse back to life, for he was hanged until dead, but I do

hope that this paper will offer new illumination on cases of criminal decapitation.

Justice and psychiatry are closely related, but it is difficult to recognize the judicial importance of so *outré* a subject as demonology. Yet I emphatically assert that the case of Jason Carse is irrevocably concerned with evil and dark lore such as mankind has not known since the Holy Inquisition.

One is naturally prejudiced against Carse, for even I myself, his lifelong acquaintance, was struck with repugnance when I first realized the nature of his activities, but his death on the gallows should foreclose biased reflection and permit the student to regard his case in a purely empirical light. As I am the only man in complete possession of the facts, it behooves me to give this astounding information to the world.

Jason Carse was a brilliant and respected criminologist, and at the time of his arrest he was recognized as one of the greatest students of the modern world, a fact which has made his case one of unparalleled notoriety. I was his roommate during the several years we spent in law school, and, although he shot to the pinnacle of his branch of jurisprudence while I was left to more prosaic routine, we never lost the contact which has now become so valuable. Our correspondence was frequent and regular since we were graduated, and I can say with justifiable pride that Carse respected my friendship as much as that of any other acquaintance, if not more. It was this intimacy with his personal life which has enabled me, as friend and confidant, to witness the revolting atavism which resulted in such outrageous crimes.

I obtained my first hazy acquaintance with the crimes three months ago when I received Carse's letter from Vienna. He had just discovered sensational evidence in a famous criminal case—one of recurrent human decapitation—and his consequent enthusiasm was so rabid that I was afraid the morbidity of such matters was beginning to pervert his senses. For several years I had become progressively aware of Carse's melancholic attitude, and I had often recommended that he take a vacation from criminal cases. His indefatigable enthusiasm for research was all against my advice, and he had gone relentlessly ahead to the tragic climax which my greatest fears could not have imagined. This letter from Vienna, so eager with indomitable *il faut travailler*, confirmed my suspicion that Carse had descended into the depressing rut of monomania.

When he returned to America shortly afterward I crossed the country to spend a few days with him, but he was so sickly and irritable that I could do nothing to cheer his spirits. He continually brooded over the case he had been investigating, and I should have known at that time there was a dangerous neurotic compulsion stirring in his subconscious mind.

Less than a week after my departure from the city the first of the horrific head-hunting crimes was committed and the actual drama got under way. I can recall reading the sensational accounts in the newspapers and my anxious fear that this fresh display of criminal perversion would excite Carse into a state nearing hysteria. I telegraphed him that same day, begging his refusal to bother with the case and requesting that he come to visit me. His reply was swift and brief; he had already commenced his investigations of the head-hunting crime and nothing on earth could deter him from his set course. Knowing him as I did, I could do nothing but hope that the Head-hunter would be swiftly captured and the case brought to a finish. It was an un-

pleasant shock, therefore, when I read—exactly one week later—that a second and identical crime had been committed.

EVEN in my own city, three thousand miles from the center of the crimes, there was wild confusion at the announcement of this second spectacular murder. The reader may recall the international effects of the infamous "Ripper" crimes which terrified London a few decades ago and he will understand how rapidly the Head-hunter's fame spread through crime-conscious America. Both murders were made particularly mysterious because of the disappearance of the victims' heads. I knew the damaging influence which these doings would produce upon Carse, for he had always been interested in decapitations, and his thesis at the University of Graz had been based upon the mad career of Emil Drukker, the Head-hunter of Cologne.

I wrote again to Carse and begged him to abandon his studies in these new murders, but, as before, his response was cold and discouraging. There was a wild and almost fanatical tone in his letter which was indicative of his obsessed mind, and an ugly premonition occurred to me that this would be the breaking-point of his career.

The third and fourth murders, so horribly identical with the first two, came about at weekly intervals, and the city was in the grip of strangling terror. There was no rime or reason for the crimes, and yet the diabolical precision of the murderer seemed to indicate he was a madman of uncanny intelligence. In all four cases his victims were vagabonds and people of the lowest order. In none of the murders had the victim been assaulted, but the head had disappeared, seemingly for ever. There was not a shred of evidence pointing to the solution, and, except that the police knew him to be a homicidal maniac, there was not a single person in a city of several millions whom they could call the murderer. Far worse than the four murders committed was the belief that they would continue week after week to an indeterminable conclusion.

I left for the city by plane on the evening of the discovery of the fifth victim, and during the trans-country flight I read Carse's own statement in the *Metropolitan Gazette* citing the crime as an atavistic expression of animalism. The fact that two of the five victims had been men, according to Carse's theory, belied the popular suspicion that the criminal was a homicidal sadist. Carse expressed the belief that the murderer was in the grip of some inherent savagery, and that the ghastly murders would continue until he wore himself out by the sheer expenditure of energy.

I reached the city shortly after sundown, and at once I felt the awful tension which had settled upon everyone in it. Men and women moved furtively, airport officials and police examined every strange face with cold and scrutinizing suspicion, and even my taxi-driver, a small mousy man, kept his fear-laden dark eyes continually reverting to the mirror as he whirled me through the slight evening traffic. I was surprized, therefore, in view of this mutual distrust, to find that Jason Carse, a veteran criminalist, had discharged all of his servants and was living alone in his grim house behind a barricaded door.

The most unpleasant shock was the unaccountably cold manner in which Carse received my visit, and his positive annoyance that I had forced myself so unexpectedly upon him. He would not explain why he had discharged his servants, nor the secluded life he was now leading, but there was little difficulty in realizing the fatiguing effects which these recent

crimes had pronounced upon him. He was virtually a stranger as we met in the hallway and shook hands.

"I wish you'd go to a hotel," he said bluntly. "I don't want anyone here."

But I didn't go to a hotel. I told him flatly that there was no other course open to me but to stay and take care of him; for obviously he wasn't taking care of himself, and his dismissal of the household help had precipitated a needless burden on his already over-laden shoulders. He needed food, for he was thin to emaciation, and I made him dress at once and accompany me to a restaurant where I saw that he ate a decent meal. I then led him to the theater, a particularly lively musical comedy, and kept him in his seat until the curtain had fallen. But my efforts seemed of no avail, as he was continually depressed and absorbed in his own reflections. That night before retiring he came to my room and again asked me to leave.

"It's for your own good," he said with strange harshness. "For God's sake believe what I say!"

For the next several days I watched him sink lower and lower into despondency of so contagious a nature that I felt the insufferable pangs of it myself. He worked late at night on the murder cases, referring constantly to autopsy protocols and police memoranda, and more than once I saw him reading his Bible. On several occasions he visited the county morgue and examined the remains of the Head-hunter's victims, and following each such visit he lapsed into a state of mental and physical agitation that exhausted him within a few hours.

The nights were almost unbearable, and I would lie awake for hours listening to the mumbles and moans which came from his room, oftentimes distinguishing such words as "God forbid it! God forbid it!" and frequently he would scream the word "Head-hunter." There was no doubt that Carse had delved too deeply into this case, and that hour by hour he was descending into the clutch of a dangerous neurosis.

During my stay with him I engaged several servants, but he discharged them, and I was unable to reconcile him to my point of view. His resentment of my visit became more acute as the days passed, and I was beginning to fear that he would forcibly eject me.

It was easy to explain this increased irritability, for I myself, as well as every soul in the city, was nervously awaiting the next prowl of the Head-hunter, and in it I recognized more fuel for the fire that was burning Carse's reason. He was waiting for the fatal Monday night as a man waits for his doom, and each hour found him closer to a mental attack. On Sunday afternoon I discovered him in my room packing my luggage.

"You must go now," he said. "I appreciate your interest in me, but now you must go—you must!"

The tremor of anxiety in his voice nearly convinced me that he was right, but doggedly I clung to my set purpose to save him in spite of himself. I could not leave him alone in face of the developments which would occur sometime between then and Tuesday morning, and I told him so.

"Fool!" he exploded; "I can do nothing with you. Stay if you wish—but it's on your own head!"

The irony of that final statement, whether intentional or not, is something I shall remember to my grave. I don't think that Carse meant it literally—*on my own head*—but I was unable to shake his words out of my ears, and throughout the night and the following day they hung about me like a dirge.

Carse did not sleep at all that Sunday

night, but paced up and down in his study while a fierce, alarming expression hardened on his features. Nor could I sleep, for his continued pacing tore my nerves to shreds, and I spent the night alternately in my own room and at the partly open doorway of the library, where I was able to watch him in secrecy. Several times I saw him bend over a small book and study it with the intent regard of a disciple, and each time that he referred to a certain page he pounded his fist on the desk and cried to himself: "God forbid! God forbid!"

I should have realized what he meant. I should have known and been prepared, but how blind my friendship made me to the horrific implication of those repeated words!

Monday came and went in a slow drizzle of rain which only added to the somber quiet of the city, and as the evening approached and wore on I felt myself caught in the irresistible tide of fearful anticipation which warned of the sixth appearance of the Head-hunter. The streets were deserted throughout the day, and with but few exceptions the only pedestrians were police officers, who now traveled in pairs or squads. The evening papers were brutally frank in predicting that before dawn a sixth headless corpse would be discovered, and this expectation was shared by all.

Carse was at home all day and refused to answer the telephone or to allow me to answer it for him. He ate sparingly, with his same preoccupation, and, contrary to my expectations, he appeared to have lapsed into a state akin to normality, like a man who contemplates a preordained and inexorable occurrence.

At six o'clock he came to me, ghastly haggard and thin, and again asked me to leave his house, but I refused this zero-hour request. He shrugged and went back to his study. I watched him for a while and saw that he was studying that queer little book which so deeply affected him, and I again heard him utter those despairing words: "God forbid! God forbid!"

I WENT to bed at a little after ten and tried to sleep, but the city-wide excitement seeped into my room and kept me tossing from the thrusts of nightmares. At midnight Carse came up and stopped just outside my door, obviously listening to determine whether I was asleep. The silence was uncanny for a moment; then I heard a sharp metallic clicking and he went on to his room. After he had closed his door, I swept my sheet aside and went to my own door. Carse had locked it from the outside!

I called to him for an explanation of this conduct, but he either didn't hear me or chose to ignore my requests, for the house remained grimly silent. Returning to bed, I managed somehow to doze off.

At two o'clock I was awakened by the sound of someone's walking in the hallway. I sat bolt-upright in bed and heard the unmistakable approach of footsteps coming down the corridor from Carse's bedroom. The tread was stealthy and determined, and as it drew closer to my room I was conscious of a cold mask of sweat clinging to my face, because the footsteps did not sound like those of Jason Carse!

The feeling hit me and hit me again until I was left stunned with the horror of it. It did not sound like Carse! But if it was not Carse, *who was it?*

I wanted to call out his name, yet I felt, with some indefinable sense, that the treader in the hall was unaware that I was in the house, and for that reason it could not have been Carse. I was afraid to make an outcry, and I sat stricken with dread as the footsteps went past my door descending the stairs. A moment later

there was a noise of cutlery being moved in the kitchen, and the front door opened and closed.

As it had come, that strange prescience vanished and I tried to reason out what I had heard. Of course the man was Carse; who could it have been save him, for were we not alone in the house? I sat for hours on the bed working up a determination to shake the truth out of him when he returned, but shortly after four o'clock my strength ran out of me and I shook with fear as I heard that awful ghost-like tread ascending the stairs. My heart beat wildly when the person reached my door and twisted the knob to enter.

One thought flashed through my head: Thank God the door was locked! The terrible feeling that it was not Carse came back upon me, and I sat motionless as I listened to the sounds from outside. For a moment there were no sounds from the intruder, but I did hear a faint tap-tap-tap like that of a liquid falling to the wooden floor. In a minute the knob was released and the footsteps continued down the hall to Carse's room.

Any attempt to explain my thoughts as I sat smoking throughout the night would only add to the confusion of these revelations. They were not sane and rational thoughts, but rather strange suggestions and premonitions. I thought myself to be in the presence of a tremendous evil.

In the morning Carse was up early, and moved back and forth in the corridor with strange industry. He was crying, for his sobs came disturbingly to my ears, and once I heard him descend into the cellar and there was a faint digging sound as he performed some outlandish task. Then I heard him in the hallway and on the stairs. I heard the splashing of water and the sound of scrubbing.

I pounded on the door for him to let me out, but it was not until nearly noon that he finished his chores and finally opened my door. He was stooped and fatigued, and without bothering to return my amenities, he turned away and went to his study.

I WENT into the hallway and noticed, as I had surmised, that the floor showed signs of recent and vigorous cleaning. I walked down to his room and looked in, not surprized to notice that here, too, was the unmistakable evidence of scrubbing. I knew there was only one more thing to do; I must go down to the cellar and unearth what he had buried there!

The horrible truth had been dawning upon me for hours, and when I came face to face with him in the kitchen at the head of the cellar stairs I looked squarely into his eyes with the full realization that Jason Carse was the Headhunter.

I was not frightened—not for my personal safety, at any rate—but a sensation of sickening horror went through me as I looked into his tired face and understood that at last he had fallen into the cesspool which had tormented him since early years. The words of the coroner came back into my ears: "He is a madman of uncanny intelligence," and I knew that he knew I recognized him for what he was.

The awful silence of our conflicting glances was unbroken for several seconds, and then words came uncontrollably from my mouth and I managed to snap that nerve-cracking tension.

"What's in the cellar?" I cried. "What have you buried there?"

"If anything happens to you," he returned, ignoring my questions, "I am not to be blamed. I warned you in time to get away from this house. What do *you* think is in the cellar?"

"I dare to suggest there are six small graves."

An ugly smirk went across his face and he cast a glance at the cellar door.

"You always were too smart for your own good," he said softly. "Knowledge can be dangerous."

"How did you think you could get away with it?" I screamed, only too well aware of his implication. "My God, Carse! Six human heads!"

His jaw hardened and he took a menacing step toward me. Then suddenly he stopped, a queer tragic expression coming over his face. He put his hand to his eyes as if to blot out some horrible memory.

"I know, I know!" he cried hysterically. "Six heads—six human heads! Do you think I planned six heads?"

A shudder went through him and he buried his face in both hands and sobbed like a child.

My personal fear gradually subsided as I watched this remorseful quiescence which had come upon him. I realized that he had passed the emotional climax of his crime, and that he was now suffering that terrible reaction which must haunt and terrify all criminals. I took this advantage to gain control of him, for there was no way of determining when his madness would flare again.

"There is only one course open for me," I told him soberly. "I must turn you over to the police. Things like this must be stopped."

He pulled his hands away from his face and stared at me, his eyes fired with dread. "No, no!" he screamed. "Don't give me away. Please, in the name of God, don't give me away! I am sick, I tell you! I am not responsible!"

A feeling of helpless pity went through me as he sank to his knees in hysterical imploration, but I steeled myself against him. The man was mad and dangerous. He must be stamped out without mercy.

"There are asylums——" I began.

"You cannot!" he cried. "You know what they do in asylums. *I* know! Please help me. I am not responsible. It is the book—*the book*."

"What book?"

"Drukker—that diary! Can't you see what it has done to me? It's eaten into my brain until I am mad. It's driven me like a slave until I have no other bidding. It taught me how to do these things. It *makes* me do them."

I pulled him to his feet and shook him unmercifully. He was crying and retching, a pitiable and horrible sight to look upon.

"You are talking irrationally," I cried. "I am your friend and I want to help you, but my first duty is the public welfare. There are six human heads buried in your cellar. There must be no more."

"No more?" he laughed shrilly and threw up both his hands to indicate the count of ten. "No more, you say? There will be ten more before it stops. Ten more! That's what the book says!"

"You want ten?" I demanded incredulously, struck numb by his callousness. "You want ten more to add to those six? Carse, Carse! They are not cabbages you are counting; they are human heads. Do you think I am a fiend to let this continue? No; it must end—it must end on the gallows."

"*He* died on the gallows!"

"He? Whom are you talking about? Try to make sense, Carse. I am your friend; trust me."

"I am talking of Emil Drukker—the man who taught me how to do these things. He is responsible for them, not I. He is the one to hang for them. Dig him out of his grave and hang him again!"

I PUSHED him gently into a chair, for his collapse seemed imminent. Spittle was running from his mouth, and his retching continued in spasms that shook him to his teeth.

"I am your friend," I told him again. "I want to help you, but you must get control of yourself. Why do you say you are not responsible? What drove you to commit these crimes?"

He looked at me searchingly and his eyes cleared. He swallowed a mass of incoherent words in an effort to master himself; then his hand pressed over mine.

"You are right; I must get control of myself," he said. "I have done some horrible things which can never be forgiven, but I swear to you that I have not done them intentionally. And I am not mad as you think. I am in the power of that book. I am the puppet of a horror that has outlived all natural deaths."

A feeling of relief passed over me as I saw him settle into a state of rational observation. I hoped it would last, for not three yards away from him, lying on top of the kitchen table, was a seven-inch butcher knife. My only hope was to preserve his state by permitting him to tell his story, and in that way to persuade him to accept the inevitable consequences of his crimes. I drew up a chair beside his own, yet kept myself alert to ward off any lunge he might make for the knife.

"What is this horror which has mastered you?" I asked in an effort to gain his confidence. "And what is this book?"

"I told you about it in my letter from Vienna six weeks ago. I told you I had discovered a rare book—an awful and compelling book. It was the diary of Emil Drukker."

"Where did you get it?"

He cast a swift glance about the room, then suddenly his eyes fell upon the butcher knife. I saw him tense, saw his lips twitch under the lash of a horrible temptation.

"Carse, tell me about it!" I yelled, to distract him. "Where did you get the book?"

He pulled his eyes away from the knife and let them burn into my face. For a moment, undecided, he was silent; then his brows straightened and he leaned forward in his chair.

"Do you remember my Graz thesis? It was based upon the life of Emil Drukker in an effort to explain what impulse drove him to cut off human heads. It was a good thesis, one of the best on the subject, and it brought a lot of response from criminologists all over the world. About six months after it was published I received a letter from a man who was once Emil Drukker's personal servant. He was living in Cologne right close to the old Drukker castle, and he wanted to see me. He told me that he knew the Drukker crimes from the first to the last—sixteen of them.

"So I went, of course, and met this man, who was small and old, with an obsession for Emil Drukker. He talked for a long time, and then he handed me the diary and said it explained more vividly than I could ever imagine the impulse which prompted Drukker's recurrent human decapitations. He told me that Drukker had written each entry while the memory of the crime was still fresh in his mind. It was a terrible book to read, he warned, and unless I had the intellectual strength of a mental Hercules I would never forgive myself for having opened it.

"Naturally I was too excited to heed his warning, and on that same night I took the book away with me. I promised to return it to him when I had finished, but he wouldn't accept this plan. Instead he said that he would come and get the book when I was through. It was a mysterious business and should have told me

to expect no good to come of it. I asked him how he would know when I had finished with the book, and I shall never forget that evil smile and disdainful shrug of his response.

" 'I shall know well enough when I read the newspapers,' he told me. 'This time it will be six or seven—in about four months from now.'

"Do you understand what he meant by those words? He knew what would happen! And yet he let me carry that book away with me! In the name of God, what kind of a man is he?"

"Why didn't you destroy the book?" I demanded of him.

"I couldn't! It was too fascinating, too powerful to destroy. I read that book with the reverence of an ecclesiastic until I knew every word between the covers, and the whole ghastly parade of Drukker's sixteen murders passed before my eyes like figures on a stage. Ten weeks ago I began to have nightmares that reconstructed the crimes of Drukker, going chronologically from Number One to Number Sixteen, then beginning all over again.

"When I returned to America seven weeks ago I still had the book with me, and the contents were so deeply engraved on my brain that I could think of nothing else. Day and night I thought about it, until at length I found myself actually imagining how I would go about emulating his crimes. Then I began to get the horrible impulse to fondle a butcher knife—Drukker used a butcher knife, you know!—and more than once I was struck with the scarcely resistible urge to cut off someone's head. It didn't matter whose head—but just a head!"

"Easy, Carse!" I cried with a wary glance at the kitchen table. "Tell me the rest, but don't excite yourself. What happened then?"

He slid back in a sort of stupor, shook his head several times, then passed his hand across his eyes in a gesture of despair.

"You ought to know damned well what happened if you were listening at your door last night. Six weeks ago I went to bed and dreamed horribly. I had just finished reading the first confession in the diary—some strange impulse made me read *that* confession and no other—and in my sleep I saw a human head staring at me. It was a cruel, Teutonic head, and I knew that it was Emil Drukker's head hanging in a gallows rope. Then he smiled at me; a horrible, vivid, real smile, and the head vanished. From then on, for how long I cannot say, I sat as a spectator and watched the complete action of Drukker's Number One.

"I saw Drukker leave his house and walk down a dark street with no other illumination than a few scattered electric lights. I tried to imagine how they were electric lights, for they had only gas in his day, but nevertheless they were modern lights, and the street looked like the street in front of my own house. He walked about ten blocks; then he saw a woman standing on a street corner. There wasn't another soul in sight. He crept closer to her, then drew out his butcher knife and hid it in the folds of his coat—a coat which looked strangely like my own wind-breaker. He first tried to talk with the woman, but she was not interested; so he pulled out the knife and brought it sweeping down across her throat. The blood spurted like a fountain and overran Drukker's hand, but he only laughed and pushed the woman to the ground, then knelt over her and began a horrible sawing movement with his knife. When he had finished, he drew a towel from his pocket and wrapped the head tightly to prevent the blood from trailing him home. He came

back the same way and entered the house, and at the foot of the stairs he unwrapped the towel and held the thing only by its hair as he climbed the steps. The last thing I saw or heard was the blood dripping on each step as he ascended to the upper hall."

"My God!" I whispered in horror.

"But that's not the worst," Carse cried as he grabbed my arm. "When I awakened the next morning it was late and the shrieks of the newsboys stabbed into my ears. They were yelling about a cruel, brutal murder which had been committed sometime during the night. I swung my feet off the bed to arise, when my eyes fell upon the diary which rested on my night-table. It was open to the confession of Number One as if I had been reading it in my sleep. There was a strange and terrifying dread in my soul as my feet struck the floor. I felt something wet and sticky touch my toes; then I looked down. It was a woman's head staring up at me.

"The room was smeared with blood from one end to the other, and there was a gore-caked knife resting beside the head, and a crimson towel lay across my bedpost. But there wasn't a drop of blood on my hands!

"I couldn't even attempt to explain it. I only knew that a woman had been murdered and that her severed head was in my bedroom. I didn't know what to do. I couldn't force myself into the belief that I was the murderer, and I stood stunned with the weird horror of knowing that Emil Drukker's Number One had been re-enacted and that I had played his own role. Where could I turn? Whom could I ask for advice? If I was mad they would commit me to an asylum; if I was not mad they would hang me.

"I carried the head to the cellar and buried it; then I cleaned up the blood and burned the towel. In my wardrobe I found a suit of clothes smeared with fresh blood. I found my shoes and hat splattered with it, and then I found my discarded gloves stained a violent crimson, with each finger stiffened as the blood had coagulated about it. No wonder there wasn't any blood on my hands!

"I went over the house from top to bottom and eradicated every stain that might be evidence against me; then I sat down with the diary in one hand and the morning newspaper in the other. I compared the two crimes. They were identical, even to the burying of the heads. Emil Drukker had done exactly the same as I had done: he carried the head in a towel, he left it in his room overnight, he buried it in his cellar, and he cleaned up the blood the following morning. But there was one ghastly difference: Emil Drukker had committed his crime with full purposeful foreknowledge, whereas I had committed my crime under hypnotic inducement!

"There is no other answer for what has happened in these last six weeks. I have racked my brain to find another solution, but there is none. I am being hypnotized by some unexplainable force, and once each week I come under the power of this evil which directs and commands my being. Last night I went to bed with the full knowledge of what would occur during the night. That is why I locked you in your room. This morning when I awakened I found the head exactly where the other five had lain; then I carried it to the basement and buried it. I cleaned up the blood and burned the towel.

"If you are numbed with horror, try to imagine how I feel about it. Six crimes in six weeks! And I can only thank merciful God that it will end with only one more. Perhaps it is ended now. That German servant who loaned me the diary said it would be only six or seven."

"Do you think the police will believe all of this?" I demanded. "What you have told me has no sane explanation. It—it's demonism!"

CARSE smiled pitiably. "There are more things in heaven and earth," he began; then he heaved his shoulders as if flinging off an attempt at levity. "The human mind is a strange organ, and no man can explain its mysteries. I have seen too much of atavism to ridicule any theories. There is nothing we can do but wait and hope that the German servant's prediction is true. Six or seven. *Six*—or *seven?*"

"Do you mean you expect me to grant you leniency?" I exclaimed. "Great heavens, Carse, there have been six horrible murders! Society demands a reckoning."

"I have atoned enough for ten times six!" he cried. "Have you no soul in you? The crimes will stop now. The German said they would, and everything else he predicted has come true. As my lifelong friend it is your duty to see me through."

"But those six——"

"No man can bring them back to life, but I am still a living man and you must save me. I shall divide my estate among the families of the six, and I swear to you that I shall never open a book on criminology again. You must do it—you must!"

"Do you honestly believe it is over?" I asked hoarsely.

"I do; with all my heart and soul, I do!"

"But you would say that anyway," I cried. "Suppose there is a Number Seven? The blood will be upon my hands as well as yours. It is an awful responsibility, Carse. There must be no more."

"There won't be. I swear there won't be!"

He threw himself at me in an hysterical outburst of emotion. He tried to smile through the tears in his eyes, but the sight was so awful that I turned my head.

"I am still unconvinced," I said grimly. "The possibility of Number Seven is too important to overlook. Let me see Drukker's diary."

"Why?" he backed away and stared at me. "Why do you want to read the diary?"

"I want to read account Number Seven."

Carse came forward again and grabbed my arm. He shook it. "What good will that do?" he asked anxiously, "if there are only six of them? Besides, it's not a book you ought to read."

"Give me the diary!" I demanded again.

He scowled at me for a moment; then, shrugging, he reached into his pocket and withdrew a small leather-bound book. It was well worn, as if by many thumbs, and in faded gold letters across the cover were the words: Personal Diary of Emil Drukker, J. U. D.

"Sit down," I commanded. "And try to keep your nerves together. I shall do everything I can for you."

He backed away and dropped into a chair, his eyes fastened upon me in a look of almost majestic joy. And yet there was an undertone in his expression which I could not define. There was defiance there and fear. One of his hands rested on the near-by table, less than two feet from the hilt of the butcher knife, and the fingers of that hand twitched nervously.

WITH an odd sense of uneasiness I flicked open the first several pages of the book and skimmed through the contents. My German was poor, yet I was able to understand the significance of what Emil Drukker had written in his

large, scrawling hand. I read the first six accounts, then stared at Carse in amazement. His six crimes and Drukker's first six were so identical they might have been conscious reproductions. In all cases the victims were the same sex, the same age, and were in the same general walk of life. I then turned to account Number Seven and after reading a few wretched lines I gasped with horror: *it was a seven-year-old girl!*

Carse was on his feet, his jaw grim and determined. He stared fiercely at me, waiting my response.

"Carse," I muttered dazedly, "it—it——"

"You can't back out," he cried as he stepped toward me. "There will be no seven, I tell you. It's ended on six. I swear it to you!"

"No," I said, "I cannot permit such a risk. Did you read account Number Seven? He not only cut off the head, but he dismembered——"

"You can't back out!" he screamed as he shook my arm. "You can't, you can't!"

"But Carse, this is a girl—a mere child. Don't you realize it would be unpardonable even for you? No, I can never take such a risk. I must turn you over to the police."

Carse slapped me viciously, then stumbled back against the table. His face was a mask of suffused blood, his eyes wild with desperation.

"Damn you!" he cried savagely. "You are no friend; you're a cheat, a betrayer!"

Suddenly his groping fingers touched the butcher knife and he drew himself taut. His fingers wound around the hilt like slowly moving worms. For a moment there was scarcely a breath between us; then he lifted his arm and brought the knife slowly out before him. I watched, horror-stricken, unable to lift my feet from the floor. A numbing paralysis of fright seemed to come over me.

"Carse, Carse!" I muttered.

He didn't hear me; his body was tensed for the deadly spring that would bring him down upon my throat. I saw a ripple of galvanizing energy race through his hands; then I managed an outcry. At the same instant he was in the air.

THERE is no need for me to relate the events which followed; for the newspapers had assiduously described the capture and arrest of Carse, and his subsequent history, brief as it was, has become public property. To my dying day I shall carry the five-inch scar along my cheek where his knife descended upon me, and I can never cease to be thankful for that one outburst of absolute fear which tore from my lips and attracted a passing policeman; otherwise I might have been Number Seven in the grim line of epitaphs that marked the close of this fantastic case. Only by bludgeoning Carse with his stick could the officer overcome him, and it was necessary to keep him in a straitjacket until the hour of his execution.

It is a curious fact that the psychiatrists who examined Carse, several of them his former pupils, could not find him unbalanced enough to be irresponsible for his crimes. Those long and tiring vigils in the mental clinic will haunt me for life; there was no end to their searching and probing of his subconscious mind, no end to the tests and questions, the examinations and analyses which ended hopelessly against him. But even if they had found him insane, violently and homicidally insane, they would not have dared report such a finding to the court. Society demanded a death in return for a death, and Jason Carse was nailed to his coffin at the first moment of his arrest. Had he been spared the gallows by the

court, he would not have been spared the gallows by the mobs that milled about the detention prison; for continually throughout the trial was the grim reminder that society represented by mobs has not yet forgotten the use of lynch law.

Carse's death put a definite end to the head-hunting crimes in this city, and for the first time in over six weeks the metropolitan area has been able to breathe freely. I have lost a faithful and sincere friend; but I lost him, not on the gallows, but three months ago when he first discovered the diary of Emil Drukker.

It is the diary, not my mourning, which has prompted me to pen this account of my knowledge of the head-hunting crimes. During the trial, as you may remember, I sought to introduce the diary as major evidence in support of Carse's somnambulistic manias, but it was waived out of court with ridicule and contempt.

One must admit that Carse's story as he told it to me, and as I later reiterated it to the court, was fantastic and highly improbable. But there are certain irrefutable arguments in support of Carse's story which shed a terrible light, not alone upon the case, but on all criminal cases of similar nature. For one thing, a hypnotic examination by competent state alienists was completely unsuccessful in the attempt to bring forth his subconscious knowledge of any of the six murders. Secondly, Carse was unable, despite his most intense and willing efforts, to reconstruct even the smallest part of any one of the crimes. His only acquaintance with his own alleged activities was brought to him in *dreams*.

A further significant fact, which the court ignored as irrelevant, was the ghastly identity of Carse's supposed crimes and those confessed by Emil Drukker. It is impossible that this duality of murders could be brought about by mere coincidence, for the similarity of detail was carried too far. This fact alone presupposes the statement that there was a horrible and unnatural bondage between Emil Drukker and Jason Carse—the bondage of the diary!

One night of each week for six weeks Jason Carse was compelled by some unknown power to dream about a murder confessed and described in Drukker's diary. On each of these nights, while Carse watched it in a dream, an identical murder was committed somewhere in the city and the man whom he recognized as the murderer was Emil Drukker. It was as if Carse's dreams, projected into reality by the sheer vividness of the diary, had resurrected Emil Drukker from his grave and set him free to re-enact his former crimes!

I am mad, you will say; but I speak of demonism and not law. How else can you explain the duality of these murders? How else can you explain Carse's ignorance of the crimes? How else can you explain those brutal dreams, the fruit of whose reality Carse found each morning on the floor beside his bed? Nor is it enough to stop alone with this question. How many men besides Jason Carse have spent sleepless nights over the diary of Emil Drukker?

The newspapers will answer that question each time they are opened; in Paris the police discover a headless body lying along the wharves, and the murderer is still unknown; in Berlin a college professor kills himself upon the discovery of a human head lying near his bed with his own hunting-knife stuck to the hilt into its brain; in Stockholm the police discover the bodies of two women lying in an empty house—their heads have not yet been found; and in Cleveland, one of our greatest cities, is reported the discovery of the tenth headless corpse in a series of murders that has gripped the city

in terror. What kind of person commits such crimes? And why do the missing heads turn up years later in the basement of a house owned by a mild-appearing and docile old man?

Jason Carse was not the first man to pay with his life for crimes such as these, nor is he the last. It is well to beware of sickish-smelling trunks that are left in deserted houses, and I caution the reader against stepping on misshapen bundles of clothing which he may find half hidden in a clump of bushes.

For the diary of Emil Drukker is missing from the drawer where I left it, and I have been told that a strange, Germanic-looking man was seen prowling about the house just before its disappearance.

The Long Arm

By FRANZ HABL*

Creeping, writhing, insidiously crawling and groping, the long arm reached out in its ghastly errand of death

I HAD been out of Germany for thirty-five years, drawn hither and thither by various glittering of will-of-the-wisps. When I returned to my native country, I was as poor in pocket as when I left, and much poorer in illusions.

The Berlin insurance company which I had represented with such mediocre success in Switzerland, Austria and Belgium agreed to let me sell for them at home, and by a curious coincidence there was an opening in the quaint old Bavarian city in which I had been born and bred.

I will pass over the strangely mingled feelings with which I rode in a Twentieth Century railroad train past the thousand-year-old walls of one of the most curious ancient cities in Europe, a town moreover whose every winding narrow street and sharp-gabled building had been the companion of my infancy and childhood. No one seemed to know me, and I recognized no one. For several days I made no attempt to sell life insurance, but wandered in a dream, the bewildered ghost of my former self, about the spots which I had known in happier days.

One dull rainy afternoon I took refuge from the weather in a dingy little coffee-house in which, at the age of fourteen or fifteen, I along with certain boon companions, had learned the gentle art of billiards. It seemed as if every article of furniture was just as I had walked away from them, well toward half a century before. It was raining outside, and I sat alone in the gloomy, smoky old place, pondering the sweet and bitter mysteries of life.

While I sat thus, staring out with unseeing eyes at the rain which was by this time beating down smartly on the pavement, I became conscious that someone in the room was staring at me. I had not noticed that there was anyone else in the

*Adapted by Roy Temple House from the German.

dark, low-ceilinged place except the obsequious proprietor who had served me my cigar and coffee. Now I realized that a man who sat in the corner diagonally across from me was studying me curiously from over his newspaper. His face was one that I had seen before. Suddenly, across all the years, I remembered him. And in that same moment he rose and came toward me with his hand held out.

We had been in school together, in the Gymnasium. He had been a strange fellow with few friends, but had enjoyed the reputation of being the best student in his class. But in his last year in the Gymnasium he had, for what reason I never knew, excited the animosity of a cantankerous old professor who had publicly declared that Gustav was not the kind of boy who should have a Gymnasium diploma and that he, the professor, was determined never to give him a passing

"And she went, too, like the other."

grade. My father had admired the boy very much, and at one juncture when my marks looked perilously low, he had employed Gustav to tutor me. Gustav had been so successful that Father was delighted and made him a present of a silver cigarette case with Gustav's initials and mine engraved on it. I remembered all this very distinctly as we shook hands, but I was doing fast thinking, because for the life of me I couldn't remember his strange last name. I had a feeling that it was a very foreign name, Polish or Croatian or something of the sort. As he mentioned this and that, I fear I answered him a little absently and incoherently. The name was almost there. The syllables flitted tantalizingly just out of my reach. But I was sure the name began with a B. Wasn't it a Bam- or a Ban-something? Ah! I had it. Banaotovich!

From that moment the conversation went more easily. I was surprized and pleased when Banaotovich drew his silver cigarette-case out of his pocket to prove to me how highly he thought of my poor deceased father. We were soon launched on a cordial exchange of childhood memories. Banaotovich seemed a good-hearted fellow after all, and I wondered why in my childhood I had never been quite comfortable in his company. I remembered that other boys of the group had admitted to me confidentially that they were more than a little afraid of him.

THE longer we talked the more intimate, the more in the nature of a mutual confession, our conversation became. I admitted to Banaotovich that the hifalutin fashion in which I had left the town to win fame and fortune years before, had been asinine in the extreme, and that it served me just right to have to sneak back unknown and penniless. Banaotovich rejoined that for all his pride in his school marks he had remained a person of no importance, and that the pot had not the slightest intention of making itself ridiculous by calling the kettle black. He seemed almost painfully inclined to run himself down. I could feel in his manner a sort of pathetic reaching out for sympathy and consideration. And it began to seem as if he were about to tell me something or ask me for something. But whatever he had to tell seemed hard to say, and it was slow in coming over his lips.

Banaotovich ordered two bottles of the heavy native wine. I drank sparingly of it, because it goes to my head. But Banaotovich swallowed two or three glassfuls in hasty succession, and his cheeks grew flushed. There was a pause. Suddenly he leaned across the table toward me and spoke in a hoarse, excited whisper.

"Modersohn," he said anxiously, "I want to make a confession to you—a terrible confession. It may turn you against me completely. Maybe you don't want to hear it. If you don't, say so, and I'll go home. But it seems as if I've got to tell somebody about it. It seems as if I've got to find somebody who understands me and can excuse me, or it will kill me. Shall I tell you? Shall I?"

I was startled. I was reasonably sure that Banaotovich was no criminal, since he had lived half a century in his native city, undisturbed and from all he had told me solvent and respected. I had always known that he was a queer fish, a brooding, solitary sort of person, and I settled myself to listen to some harmless bit of psychopathy which meant nothing except to the unfortunate subject.

"My dear fellow," I said, no doubt a little patronizingly, "I am sure you haven't anything to confess that will make you out an outrageous rascal, but if

it will do you any good to tell me your troubles, I am ready to listen to them."

"Thank you," said Banaotovich in a trembling voice. "I've done nothing that they can put me behind the bars for. But I—I——"

He stared at me sternly.

"But I've done worse things," he said solemnly, "than some poor fellows that have been strung up by the neck and choked to death!"

I laughed, a little nervously. "Tell me your story, if you like," I said, "and let me decide just how black you are. But I haven't a great deal of apprehension. We're all of us poor miserable sinners, as far as that's concerned. I could tell you things about myself——"

Banaotovich was not listening to me at all. He had fallen suddenly into a fit of black brooding. After a minute or two, he looked up and asked sharply:

"Do you remember Wolansky?"

Wolansky was the Greek professor who had threatened to vote against Banaotovich when he was finishing his course at the Gymnasium.

"Of course," said I. "And I remember well how he abused you that last year. If there ever was a cantankerous old scoundrel, Wolansky was just that identical individual!"

"Maybe," he said absently; then after another pause:

"Do you remember that Wolansky died suddenly, just a litle while before the end of the school year?"

I nodded. "I imagine that was a great piece of good luck for you," I said.

"Yes," said Banaotovich. "If he had lived, I should never have had my diploma. As it was, I finished with honors. If Wolansky hadn't died when he did, I'd have been ruined. Don't forget that —ruined!"

I was puzzled at his insistence. "Yes, you would have been seriously handicapped," I agreed. "Ruined is the word, perhaps."

Banaotovich's face was purple with wine and some strange kind of suffering. "Do you remember another thing?" he said thickly. "Do you remember an old Hindoo who had a dark little hole away back of the shops and the beer depot and the livery stables between the Old Market and the river?"

"The old fellow that had love charms and told fortunes and helped people to health and wealth and happiness?" I said in a tone of slightly forced cheerfulness. It was hard to be cheerful with those somber eyes boring into you. "Yes, I remember him, all right. I wanted to go and see him once, when I was about fifteen or sixteen, but Father told me that meddling with the black art had sent more people to hell than it had helped. And Father was so terribly earnest about it that he frightened me. I never went. As a matter of fact it was only a passing fancy, and I soon forgot all about him."

"That Hindoo," said my old schoolfellow thoughtfully, "knew things about the secret forces in the universe that made him almost a god. And he taught me things that the wisest philosopher in the world doesn't suspect. Still, your father may have beeen right. I think it very likely that what he taught me may send me to hell!"

I shivered. I looked up nervously to make sure that the way was clear to the door. I began to suspect that my friend Banaotovich, though he was certainly not a criminal, might be a dangerous lunatic.

My *vis-à-vis* rubbed absently at a protuberance on his left side. I had noticed it when he first came across the room to speak to me. A deformity—I was sure it had not been there when he was a boy—or perhaps a tumor or some such thing as that.

"I kept very quiet about what the Hindoo taught me, because I knew most people felt about such things much as you say your father did. And I wanted to get on in the world. But I had an idea the Hindoo could help me get on. Perhaps he *has*——"

And he stared gloomily at space.

"Perhaps he has. And perhaps he hasn't."

He brooded. Then he took up the thread of his story.

"Wolansky nearly drove me to suicide. I read and studied and crammed, day and night. I tried everything I could think of to overcome the man's antagonism. I crawled in the dust before him like a whipped cur! Nothing did any good. And when I saw he hated me and was determined to smash me, I began to hate *him*, too. I came to hate him worse than I hated the devils in hell. There was a time when I had to hold myself back with all my strength to keep from sticking a knife into him or braining him with a chair. But the Hindoo and I made some experiments with telepathy, and I discovered that there are other ways of killing a man besides stabbing him or giving him poison.

"I learned how to make a man in front of me on the street turn around and look at me. I learned how to make *you* dream about me and come and tell me the dream the next morning" (when he said that, I jumped, for I remembered having done exactly that thing!). "I learned how to bring out a bruise on Wolansky's face although he lived on the other side of town; so that he went around asking people how he could have bumped his forehead without knowing it. And at last I went to bed one night, set my mind on Wolansky, and said over and over to myself a thousand times: Die, you dog! You've *got* to die! I *order* you to die!

"I said it over till I fell into a sort of trance. It wasn't sleep, I tell you. You can't sleep when you are in a state like that. And in my trance, I could feel another arm grow out of my side here and grow longer and longer, and grow out through the window although the window was closed, and grow out across the street and down the street and right through the walls and across the river.

"I had never known where Wolansky lived. But that night I knew. I had never known the street or the house number. I had never been there in my life. But I can tell you just exactly how his bedroom looked. The wash-stand between the two windows, the work-table against the west wall, the wardrobe, the old divan against the north wall. In a corner the blue-gray tiled stove with some of the tile chipped off. And against the south wall—the bed he lay in. I can tell you the color of the blanket he pulled up over his face. It was a dirty brownish red.

"But my hand seemed to go through the blanket and grip Wolansky by the throat. First he sighed and turned his head to one side and tried to wriggle free. Then he raised his arms and tried to get hold of something that wasn't there. His sighs turned into groans, and the groans changed to a death rattle. He threw his arms and legs wildly around in the air, his body bent up like a bow. But my hand held his head down against the pillow. At last he quit struggling and dropped down limp on the bed. Then the arm came crawling back in to my body, and I came out of the trance—and went to sleep—or perhaps I fainted.

"The next morning the director came into our classroom and told us Wolansky had died in the night of some sort of attack. You remember that, I am sure——"

When Banaotovich began to tell me this story, he had looked away from me,

and his eyes never met mine during the telling. He had begun with a painful effort, but as he went on he grew more and more excited and more and more inflamed with hatred of the malicious old Greek teacher, till it almost seemed as if he had forgotten me and was living the astounding experience through for himself alone. When he was through, his ecstasy of indignation left him and he sat dejected and apprehensive, studying me pitifully out of the corners of his deep gray eyes.

When he stopped speaking, there was a moment of silence. Then I said something. I think what I said was, "Very extraordinary!"

He smiled, a strained, sarcastic smile. "Extraordinary?" he repeated, with an interrogation point in his voice.

"Your nerves were strained to the breaking-point," I said. "Your trouble with the old rascal had driven you half distracted. Then there was all that occultistic hodgepodge with the old Hindoo. And you were overworked and run down, anyway. No wonder you dreamed dreams and saw visions. And it may have been that there was some telepathic contact between you and Wolansky, and when he had his apoplectic attack——"

The sarcastic smile deepened on Banaotovich's face. "So you have it all explained, and I'm acquitted?" he inquired.

"Acquitted?" I cried. "You were never even accused. If the state were to bring action against every man who had a feeling that he would be happier if someone else were out of the way, the state would have a big job on its hands!"

"Very true," Banaotovich assented icily. "I see I haven't got very far with you yet. You are forcing me to continue my not very edifying autobiography.—Did you know my father?"

I remembered his father, and I remembered that he had not enjoyed the best possible reputation.

"I think I knew him," I said hesitantly. "He was a—a money-lender, wasn't he?"

"Don't spare my feelings," said Banaotovich bitterly. "He was a usurer, and a cruel one. I had a feeling for years that his business was a disgrace to the family, and I made no bones about telling him so. There were ugly scenes. I thought several times of leaving home. Finally, Father told me one day that since I didn't approve of the way he got his money, he was doing me the favor of disinheriting me. I told him that was all right with me, that I'd rather starve than live on money that was stained with the blood of poor debtors.

"I thought at the time that I meant it. But about that time I had become interested in a young woman. I had never had much to do with the girls, and very few of them seemed at all interested in me. But this one appeared to like me, and when I made advances to her, she didn't repel me. I am no connoisseur of female beauty, but I think she was unusually attractive, and at that time I was half mad about her. Still waters run deep, you know.

"Well, she had me under her spell so completely that I changed my mind about Father's money. I began to truckle to him, much as I had truckled to Wolansky. I began to feel him out to find whether he had made a will. He was very cold and non-committal. Finally I asked him outright if he would reconsider his decision to leave me penniless. He told me it was I that had made the decision, not he, and that he had no use for wishy-washy people that changed their minds like weather-cocks. He was very sarcastic. I lost my temper and answered him back. We had a terrible quarrel, and finally he —he struck me. I was twenty years old

and a bigger man than he. And I think no man ever had more stubborn pride, at bottom, than I have.

"It was the Wolansky thing all over again. The humiliation, the effort at ingratiation, the failure, the long, eating, gnawing, growing hatred. And it—it ended the same way. The night of brooding that hardened into a devilish decision, the vision of the long arm, growing, stretching, crawling—but not so far this time, only through two walls and across our own house. You remember that Father died of an apoplectic stroke, just as Wolansky had done a year or two before."

"Yes, I think I remember," I said in considerable embarrassment. The thing *did* begin to look uncanny. I was thoroughly sorry for the poor, cracked fellow, but I would just as soon not have been alone with him in that solitary drinking-place in the twilight.

"Well?" he said, almost sharply.

"Well, Banaotovich," I answered with a show of confidence, "you have had a great deal of unhappiness, and you have my sympathy. This strange faculty you have of anticipating deaths, like the night-owls and the death-watch that ticks in the walls, has made these bereavements an occasion of self-torment for you. I think you should see a psychiatrist."

"Anticipating — anticipating?" Banaotovich had gone back and was repeating a word I had used, and as he repeated it he drummed madly on the table with his fingers. "It's a curious coincidence that 'anticipating' is just the word my wife used when I told her about it."

"You—told—your wife—what you have just told me?" I stammered. "Do you think that was wise?"

"I couldn't help it," he said with a catch in his throat. "I thought I loved her, and I had to talk to somebody. I was miserable, and I had a feeling that she might understand and be brought closer to me by sympathy. Now that I think of it, I can see that I was an egregious idiot, but I discovered long ago that we aren't rational beings after all. We are driven or drawn by mysterious forces, and we go to our destination because we can't help it.

"My wife had always seemed a little timid with me. I never seemed to have the gift of attracting people. And I don't know whether she would ever have been interested in me at all if I hadn't used a little—a little charm the Hindoo taught me. Perhaps that didn't have much to do with it—but I had never been happy with her. However that may be, one evening when she seemed unusually approachable, I had just the same impulse that I had when I met you here tonight, and I told her about Wolansky and Father. She pooh-poohed it all just as you did. But she was afraid. I could see that. She was more and more afraid of me as the days went by. For a long time she tried to be cordial and natural in my presence, but it was a sham and the poor thing couldn't keep it up. Each of us knew as well what was in the mind of the other as if we had talked the situation over frankly for hours. We reached the point where we couldn't look each other in the face. No solitude could have been as ghastly as that solitude of two people who shared a revolting secret. For I had convinced her that I was guilty. I had succeeded in doing what I had set out to do, and I had ruined two lives in doing it. I have the faculty, it seems, of poisoning whatever I touch. Only today, my wife said to me——"

I started to my feet with a great rush of relief and thankfulness. "Ah, your wife is alive, then?" I cried.

"My wife is alive. That is—my *second* wife is alive," he said, with a horrible forced smile.

I sank back gasping. "What did you do with your first wife, you dirty hound?" I moaned in helpless indignation.

He closed his eyes, and a wave of bitter triumph played about the muscles of his mouth. "Have I convinced *you* too, at last?" he said.

Then I realized that I had been an insulting idiot. At worst, the man before me was a pathological case, and he certainly belonged in an asylum rather than in a prison.

"Forgive me, Banaotovich," I panted. "I don't know what made me——"

He looked at me sadly, almost compassionately. "There is nothing to forgive," he said, very quietly. "I am all you called me and a thousand times worse. Now let me finish my story."

"You don't need to," I said hastily. "I know all the rest of it."

All interest, I am afraid nearly all sympathy, had gone out of me. What I wanted most of all was to get away from this melancholy citizen with power and madness in his gray eyes.

"No, you don't know quite all of it yet," he insisted. "Perhaps if I tell you the whole story, even if you can't excuse me—and I don't deserve your excusing, I don't *want* your excusing—you can understand me a little better, and think of me a little more kindly.

"There was another woman. I couldn't help it, any more than any of us can help anything. A fine, sympathetic young woman, who loved me because she knew I was unhappy. I had been married to the other woman for four years. We were completely estranged. We could scarcely bear to speak to each other. I couldn't be easy one moment in the same house with her. I had a cot in my office out in town because I couldn't even sleep soundly at home. It was hell. The terror in her eyes made me physically sick. My wife learned about the other woman. My wife was a devout Catholic, and there was no possibility of a divorce. I could read in my wife's face just what went on in her mind. She knew the other woman had become my only reason for living. And one day I read in her eyes, along with the terror, a glint of desperate determination. She knew she was in danger, she knew I had a power that I could exercise when I chose in spite of all the courts and police and jails in the country. She knew her life was in danger, and her eyes told me that mine was in danger for that very reason. I didn't blame her. Half my grief through all the years had been grief for *her*. But the instinct of self-defense in me was strong—and—she went—too—like——"

He never finished his sentence. He dropped his head on the table and began to sob hysterically. I laid a gingerly hand on his shoulder.

"Banaotovich," I said unsteadily, "I'm sorry for you——"

He sat up and supported his chin in both hands. "I haven't been as—as bad as all this sounds like," he said after a while. "Before I was married a second time, I went to the chief of police and gave myself up. The chief listened to my story—I didn't try to explain it all, as I've done with you, but just blurted out the main facts; but the longer he listened the uneasier he became, and when I got through he asked me nervously if I didn't think I ought to go into a sanitarium for a while. Then he bowed me out in a big hurry. Perhaps if I had told him all the ins and outs of it, it might have been different——"

"But don't you think he's right about the sanitarium?"

"Right? I'm as sane as you are. I've killed three people, a crazy scoundrel, a

hard man, and a pure, innocent woman. But I did it all because I had to. A sanitarium wouldn't do me or anyone else any good, and it would be a heavy expense. I have taken the responsibility for another pure, innocent woman, and I must support her. The war and the depression swept away my father's fortune, and my present business has dwindled away till I am making only the barest living. I have applied for the agency for a big Berlin insurance company, and if I can get it, along with my other business, I shall be fairly comfortable. But I understand there is some talk of their sending in a representative from outside. If they do that, if they take the bread out of my mouth like that, it won't be good for the outsider!"

He was drunk, and his drunkenness was working him into an ugly mood. He was dangerous, and physical courage was never my strong point.

"What is the name of the Berlin company?" I asked timidly.

He named the firm I myself worked for. Then he fumbled for his bottle, and with stern and painful attention set about the difficult and delicate task of filling his glass again. I muttered something about being back in a moment, and made for the door. He was too busy to pay any attention to me.

When I had the door safely shut behind me, I sprinted through the rain to my hotel as if the devil himself were after me. . . .

It was a long time before I got over waking up in the middle of the night with the feeling that an icy, iron-muscled hand was clutching at my throat. I don't have the experience often any more, but I have never seen the city of my birth since that awful night. I got out on the midnight train, and my company obligingly gave me territory on the other side of Germany.

Some time ago I happened to see a notice in the paper to the effect that a certain patient named G. Banaotovich had died suddenly in the Staatliche Nervenheilanstalt in Nuremberg. But I have met the name rather frequently of late, and I think it is a fairly common one. I didn't investigate.

"She whirled and undulated to the barbaric rush of the music."

The Lake of Life

By EDMOND HAMILTON

A weird scientific thrill tale of adventure, mystery and romance—of the waters of immortality, the strange Red and Black cities, and the dread Guardians that watched eternally over that terribly glowing lake

The Story Thus Far

"DEEP in the unexplored jungles of equatorial Africa lies the Lake of Life. It is a lake of shining waters that contain the pure essence of life, the origin of Life on earth, and it is guarded by unhuman, terrible beings the Guardians. And anyone who drinks of those shining waters becomes immortal."

That is the legend of many African tribes. Asa Brand, senile American millionaire morbidly afraid of death, believes

that legend and thinks if he drinks of those waters his life will be vastly extended. So he has offered Clark Stannard, young adventurer, a half-million dollars if he procures for him a flask of waters from the Lake of Life.

Clark Stannard does not himself believe the shining waters will confer immortality, but has undertaken the quest. His five hard-bitten followers are Blacky Cain, gangster; Mike Shinn, former heavyweight prizefighter; Lieutenant John Morrow, disgraced army officer; Link Wilson, a Texan cowboy; and Ephraim Quell, former Yankee sea captain.

The quest has brought the six into a hidden land surrounded by the Mountains of Death, mountains which it is death to tread upon. They have gained entrance to the prisoned land by floating down a wild river that flows in through a chasm in the mountains.

In this hidden land they find two cities of white people, at war with each other. They are K'Lamm, city of the Reds, and Dordona, city of the Blacks. Clark and his five men repel a band of black warriors who attack them, and capture their leader. The leader is Lurain, wildcat daughter of the ruler of Dordona.

Then they are surrounded by a large force of Red warriors from the near-by city K'Lamm. Clark learns that the Lake of Life exists somewhere near the city Dordona. The Dordonans hold it is sacrilege for anyone to try to drink of the Lake of Life. But the people of K'Lamm thirst to drink of it and become immortal; so that there is war between the two peoples.

Clark Stannard believes that his only chance of reaching the lake is to join Thargo, king of K'Lamm, as an ally. He agrees to go to the Red city, but stipulates that the girl Lurain is his prisoner, not anyone else's. The six American adventurers and their prisoner and escort of Red warriors are now riding into the city K'Lamm.

The story continues:

---

6. *The King of K'Lamm*

THE city K'Lamm was circular in outline and more than two miles in diameter, surrounded by a forty-foot wall. The wall and buildings and cobbled streets were all of quarried stone, stained bright red by some secret of pigmentation. The buildings were mostly flat-roofed, one-story ones, shops and stalls and dwellings. The inhabitants were swarming excitedly out of them as the cavalcade rode down the street.

Clark saw that at least half the men wore the crimson armor and the long swords—it was a strongly military population. The helmeted warriors, the simple architecture and weapons, all looked medieval to Clark, as though the civilization of this isolated, prisoned people had not progressed further than the Middle Ages of the outside world. There were many women, wearing extremely scanty white tunics that came only to their knees and left half their white breasts bare.

"Say, there's some good-lookin' dames in this burg," said Mike Shinn, the prizefighter's eyes sweeping the crowd.

"And there are a lot of hard-looking warriors here too," Clark reminded him grimly. "Hands off, Mike."

"What the devil, we could put the blast on this mob easy," sneered Blacky Cain. "There isn't a gat in the whole crowd."

The men and women of K'Lamm seemed inspired with savage fury as they saw the girl prisoner in black armor, in front of Clark.

"Death to Lurain of Dordona!" they

yelled, shaking swords and fists in imprecation. "Death and torture for the Dordonan wench!"

Lurain looked neither to right nor left. Again that strong, unwilling respect for the girl stirred in Clark Stannard.

"You are still *our* prisoner," he leaned forward to tell her. "They shall not take you from us."

"I do not fear them—nor you," snarled Lurain without turning. "The day comes when this Red spawn go to their doom."

At the end of the broad avenue down which they rode loomed the largest building in the city. It was an hexagonal scarlet tower, blunt and truncated, a hundred feet high, a squat, ugly structure. They dismounted in front of it, and the Red captain Dral strode to them.

"The king Thargo has been already informed of your coming and anxiously awaits you," he informed Clark smoothly.

"Lead the way," Clark said curtly. "Our prisoner goes with us." And as they started forward he muttered to his men, "Keep close together and don't make a move unless we're attacked."

They followed Dral into the building, past red-armored guards and down corridors. Dral clanked in the lead, Clark following with the girl, her dark head high, his five men rolling belligerently along and staring about with frank curiosity.

They emerged into a large, round banqueting-hall with red stone walls, lit by shafts of sunset from slit-like windows. All around it were tables, empty now except for one raised on a dais. There alone sat a man in the red helmet and armor, a great jewel blazing on his breast. Behind him hovered a wrinkled-faced, withered old man with sly eyes.

"The strangers and the captive, great king," announced Dral as he paused and bowed to the sitting man. The man stood up.

"You are welcome, strangers," Thargo told Clark. "Yes, more than welcome, when you bring as captive Lurain of Dordona."

Thargo, king of K'Lamm, was a big man. Well over six feet he towered, and his shoulders were as broad as Mike Shinn's. His shining red armor well set off that towering, great-thewed figure.

There was power in his face, not only the arrogant consciousness of utter authority, but hard power innate in the man himself. It was in the square, merciless mouth, in the flaring nostrils, strongest of all in the black, penetrating eyes behind which little devil-lights of mockery and amused contempt seemed to dance.

"Be ready for trouble," Clark muttered to his men. "It may pop right this minute."

For Dral, the Red captain, was now making a respectful report to his lord. And Thargo stiffened as he heard.

"So you claim the Black girl as your prisoner?" he said to Clark, his eyes narrowing.

Clark nodded curtly. "We do. We took her, and she is ours."

"Now why, strangers from outside, did you penetrate this land?" Thargo asked thoughtfully. "No others from outside have ever crossed the death mountains and entered. What object brought you here?"

"In the great world outside," Clark told him, "there are legends of a strange, shining lake in this land. We came in search of that lake, and once we find it, will return with some of its waters to our own land."

"The legends you heard were true, strangers," said Thargo, with changed expression. "That shining Lake of Life does exist in this land, but not here, not at K'Lamm. For many generations we of K'Lamm have been striving also to win to that lake. It may be," he added

craftily, "that you and I should become allies. Dral tells me your weapons are strange and powerful. Together we would have no trouble in winning to the Lake of Life."

"Never will you win to the Lake, Red dog!" lashed Lurain's silver voice suddenly. "Even if you conquered us of Dordona, there are still—the Guardians."

"The Guardians?" echoed Thargo, then uttered a deep laugh. "Why, the Guardians are but a myth, a legend. For ages that myth has kept you of Dordona from the lake, but it shall not keep us. No!"

His nostrils were flaring with abrupt passion, his black eyes suddenly all devil. Clark seemed to glimpse in the man's wolfish face a long-repressed, eating ambition, a desire of superhuman intensity, baffled and raging. Then Thargo smiled smoothly at him.

"We shall talk of these things later, strangers. Meanwhile, you are welcome in K'Lamm. Tonight we banquet here in your honor, and until then the finest rooms in this palace are yours."

"Our prisoner goes with us," Clark said coolly.

"Your prisoner goes with you, of course," Thargo agreed smoothly. "But guard the little wildcat well, I warn you. I do not think she could escape from this palace"—a gleam of mirth crossed his eyes—"no, I do not think that, but she might do harm if not guarded.

"Dral will conduct you to your rooms," he finished courteously. "Until tonight, strangers."

Clark bowed curtly. Then, taking Lurain's tensed arm, he followed the suave captain out of the great banquet hall. His five men strode after him, and Dral led the way up a broad stone stair to an upper floor of stone-walled corridors and rooms. He conducted them into a suite of four large rooms.

Tapestries depicting combats of red and black armored soldiers hung on the walls, and lay on the floor. There were chairs and couches, and a series of great windows whose unshuttered openings looked out on the flat red roofs of K'Lamm, gleaming in the sunset. Dral bowed and left them, closing the door. The girl Lurain went over to the window and stood, a slim figure, looking silently out over K'Lamm.

"Say, what was all the powwow about?" Blacky Cain asked Clark. "This moll seemed to get the big shot's goat."

Clark told them briefly what had passed between him and Thargo.

"As far as I can see," Clark finished, "our best course is to play along with Thargo until we find out where we stand. He wants to get to the lake, that's evident—he believes that stuff about its waters conferring immortality. It's also evident that Lurain's people, the Dordonans, prevent him from reaching the lake and would prevent us also. Our best chance to reach this Lake of Life may be to throw in with Thargo."

"Why didn't you give up this girl to the Red king, then?" asked Lieutenant Morrow. "It would put us in solid with him."

"But Thargo would likely have had her killed or tortured," Clark objected. "It's plain he'd like nothing better."

"Well, what if he did?" shrugged the young ex-army officer indifferently. And Morrow's face was bitter with memory as he added, "Keeping her our own prisoner may wreck everything—it won't be the first time a woman's done it."

"Why, ye heartless scut," said Mike Shinn wrathfully, "would ye give up a spunky girl like that to be killed?"

"We're not giving her up," Clark said decisively. "I want to question her about the Lake of Life."

He advanced toward Lurain, and the

Dordonan girl turned and met his gaze defiantly, with hot, stormy blue eyes.

"Lurain, just where is the Lake of Life?" Clark asked. "If you told us that, it may be we'd let you escape from here."

"Would you?" asked Lurain doubtfully, coming closer to him. Clark nodded quickly, in affirmation.

"Yes, we would. Can you tell us how to reach the lake?"

Lurain came so close that the haunting perfume of her blue-black hair was in his nostrils, her troubled eyes raised.

"I cannot tell the secrets of the sacred lake," she said slowly, worriedly. "But I can tell you—*this!*"

And her hand suddenly jerked out the sheath-knife at Clark's belt, and stabbed it with lightning speed at his heart.

7. *Thargo's Treachery*

INSTINCT can save itself where the momentary delay of reason would be fatal. It was not the first time in his life that Clark Stannard had seen the swift deadly flicker of steel licking toward his heart. The sight exploded his brain and body into instant action.

He threw himself staggeringly backward, and the bleak steel whizzed down through the front of his shirt, scoring his breast like a white-hot wire. Before Lurain could turn the blade and strike upward, Clark's brown hand grabbed her wrist. He twisted it, and was not gentle. There was a cold, savage anger in his brain. The knife clattered to the floor from the twisted hand. Lurain's blue eyes blazed out of a paper-white face, but she uttered no cry of pain or fear, hate throbbing from her.

"So you'd trick me, would you?" spat Clark harshly. "You'd kill me to keep me from reaching your sacred lake, eh?"

"Yes, I would!" Lurain's voice cracked like a silver whip. "You who would become Thargo's ally, who would help him and the other blasphemers of K'Lamm who lust for the lake—you deserve death!"

"I warned you," Lieutenant Morrow told Clark bitterly. "All women are alike—just playing you for a sucker."

"Say, the dame's got nerve!" said Blacky Cain, respect and admiration in the gangster's pale eyes.

"She sure has," grinned Link Wilson. "Reminds me of a litle Mex down in Agua Prieta who tried to knife me one night, when——"

"Hell, we can do without autobiography," rasped Clark. "Bring cords and we'll tie her hands—she's not safe unbound."

When they had finished securing the bonds around Lurain's wrists, the Dordonan girl sat and glared at them fiercely.

"Someone has to stay here and watch her while we're down at this banquet," Clark declared. "Not only because she might escape, but because I don't trust Thargo too far. Quell, will you stay?"

"I'll watch her," Ephraim Quell nodded dourly. "Don't figger I'd care much for the goings-on down there, anyway."

Night fell quickly. From the window, K'Lamm stretched a mass of dark, flat roofs in the starlight, with windows and doors spilling red torchlight. Somber against the climbing stars bulked the looming, mighty barrier of the Mountains of Death.

Clark and his men shaved, brushed their clothes, and made what improvements they could in their appearance, by the light of the flickering torches servants had brought. Then Dral appeared, his long sword clanking on the stone floor as he entered.

"The lord Thargo awaits you at the banquet, strangers," he said, his eyes flickering toward the bound girl.

The great, round banquet hall flared brightly with ruddy torchlight when Clark Stannard and his four companions entered it after Dral. Now the tables that ran around the room were laden heavily with cooked meats and fruits and big glass flagons of black and yellow wines. At them sat more than a hundred men and women, the nobles and artistocrats of feudal, medieval K'Lamm.

The men wore the red metal-mesh tunics and their swords, even at table. The women wore chitons of red stuffs much like the garments of the women they had seen in the city, but richer, embroidered with gold and jewels. Their upper breasts and arms were bare as in the old Cretan costume. They drank and laughed with the male feasters. But they and all in the hall fell silent, staring in eager curiosity at these five swaggering strangers who first in all the history of this land had entered from outside the deadly mountains.

"Welcome to our feast, strangers," Thargo greeted in his powerful voice. "Here are seats for you, and here are wine and meats and women, for we count you as ourselves who are, we hope, to be our allies in the great quest we soon shall make."

The Red king's face was frank and open, the sincerity of his greeting warming. But, Clark wondered, was there not a suppressed gleam in his black eyes, a quirk of secret amusement?

Clark took the backless metal chair held out for him, beside Thargo himself. His four followers were distributed further along the table. On the other side of Clark sat a languorous beauty introduced to him as Yala, the sister of Thargo. Despite his inward alertness, Clark could not but be moved to admiration by the coal-black hair, smooth ivory skin and audaciously revealed rounded figure of this princess of K'Lamm. Her velvety black eyes met his curiously.

But he turned toward Thargo. He felt that the time had come to learn what he could of the mysteries surrounding him.

"You still wish us, then, to become your allies in an attempt to reach the Lake of Life?" he asked bluntly.

"Very much I wish it," Thargo avowed frankly. "You carry weapons of a power unknown here, and they will make certain our victory; though I am sure that even without them, we still could crush Dordona."

"Where is the lake?" Clark demanded directly.

"It lies beneath us," Thargo answered.

"Beneath us?"

"Aye," the Red king nodded. "Deep beneath this prisoned land, under leagues of solid rock, exists a great cavern, and in that cavern lies the shining Lake of Life."

"Then how in the world can you hope to reach it?" exploded Clark, stiffening.

"There is only one way down to that cavern of the lake," Thargo told him. "It is a pit, or shaft, whose mouth is in the city of our enemies, Dordona, near the eastern edge of this land. The river that flows through the mountains runs across this whole land, and drops into that pit.

"Long ago," Thargo continued, "our ancestors came into this land from the outside world. They climbed over the mountains, for at that time, so legend says, it was not death to tread the mountains, as it is now. They explored the land, and found the pit into which the river falls, and went down that pit into the cavern where lies the Lake of Life. And they learned that if they drank those waters they would become immortal, but they were forbidden to drink of them.

"They were forbidden, they said, by

strange, unhuman beings who dwelled down in the cavern of the lake and guarded its waters of immortality. These beings, the Guardians, bade those exploring humans to return to the surface, and never again come down to drink of the waters, since that was an unholy thing. So the men returned in fear to the surface, obeying the command. And legend says that the Guardians then cast a deadly force on the mountains around this land, which still invests them, so that no more men might enter this land in future.

"The people who were already within this land founded a city around the mouth of that shaft to the underworld. They called the city Dordona and over the mouth of the pit they built a temple. They considered it blasphemy for any to think of descending the pit to the Lake of Immortality and, in their superstition, they slew any who dared to try it. For they were in great fear of the Guardians they believed dwelling below, though none but the first explorers had ever seen those beings.

"But as generations passed, age after age, rebellion grew up in the city Dordona. Many of its people said, 'Why should we die when beneath our feet lie the waters of immortality? Who are the Guardians, to forbid us the lake? Let us not allow them to monopolize the waters of immortality longer; let us go down and drink of them whether they permit it or not, so that we may become undying.' "

Thargo's fist clenched, his eyes glittered, as he continued, "Thus spake the rebellious ones in Dordona! They sought by force to enter the pit and descend to the lake. But most of the Dordonans were still swayed by superstitious fears of the mysterious Guardians. They put down the rebels by force, prevented them from entering the pit. After that, the rebels deserted Dordona and came here to the western edge of this land and founded a new city, this city of K'Lamm.

"And ever since then, we of K'Lamm have desired to go back and conquer the Dordonans and go down the pit to the Lake of Life. We had not the strength, at first. But during past generations, more and more people have deserted from Dordona to our city, coming to believe as we do that it is folly to grow old and die when immortality is in our grasp. So that now, stranger, we of K'Lamm are powerful enough at last to attack Dordona, crush the superstitious Blacks, force our way down to the shining lake, and drink its waters and achieve immortality!"

"You actually believe, then," Clark Stannard said incredulously, "that the waters of the lake would confer immortality?"

"I am sure of it!" Thargo said, his eyes flashing. "If we drink of them we shall never die, for they contain the pure essence of life itself. *That* fact, our exploring ancestors were sure about."

"Yet you're not afraid of meeting the legended Guardians, if you penetrate to the lake?" Clark asked curiously.

Thargo laughed contemptuously. "The Guardians do not frighten us, for we do not think they still watch down there by the lake. No man has seen them for ages, and even the few who saw them ages ago were not slain by them. I think that even if the Guardians still exist down there, they will not be able to stop us."

Here was a frank, unfearing skeptic, Clark thought. It was odd that while Thargo was so skeptical of the dreaded Guardians, he still believed in the impossible virtues of the shining lake.

"Why," Clark asked bluntly, "do you want our help, if you have enough forces to overwhelm Dordona, as you say?"

"We want it," Thargo said frankly,

"not because we need your help—easily can we overcome Dordona—but because we do not want you *against* us, strangers, with your strange, powerful weapons. And for reward for joining us," the Red king added, "you shall drink the waters of the Lake of Life with us. You will become immortal, strangers, as we will."

THARGO's black eyes flashed with strange light, his fist clenched tight, his voice pregnant with emotion.

"To be immortal—think what that will mean! To stride the world undying, generation after generation, feared and worshipped by the races that continue to die! By the sun, once I have drunk those waters of undying life, I will go forth from this prisoned land, will rule——"

He stopped abruptly, glancing at Clark with narrowed eyes. Then he continued in a smooth, lower tone.

"But what is your answer, stranger, now that you know the situation? Do you join forces with us to attack Dordona?"

Clark hesitated. A strong instinct told him not to commit himself.

"I think we will join you," he said slowly, "but before I give my word on it, I must speak with my followers. If we do join you, our reward is to be as much of the shining waters as we wish to take."

"Has that Dordonan wench Lurain tried to turn you against me?" Thargo asked suspiciously. "Has she endeavored to make you an ally of her doomed people?"

"She tried to kill me, but an hour ago," Clark said tartly. "There's no danger of my becoming her ally."

Yet it seemed to him that smoldering suspicion persisted in Thargo's eyes. Then the Red king laughed and exclaimed:

"But we will talk further of this in the morning. We neglect the feast."

He raised his big hand in a signal. From an alcove suddenly thrummed music, weird harmonies of plucked strings. It throbbed louder, wilder, and a score of supple girls in shimmering veils rushed lightly to the center of the torch-lit hall.

They began to dance in the space between the tables, swaying, whirling and undulating to the barbaric rush of the music, their white limbs gleaming through the gossamer of the swirling veils.

"Whoopee!" shouted Mike Shinn happily over the wild music, from down the table. "This is better than a night-club."

"Don't bother me, Mike," drawled Link Wilson, his tanned reckless face bending toward a laughing girl beside him. "I'm doin' right fine in sign-language with this *muchacha*."

"I'll say this beats that damned jungle, anyway," Clark heard Blacky Cain saying with a rasping chuckle.

But Lieutenant Morrow sat drinking and staring moodily, with bitter eyes, at the whirling, weaving girls.

"You do not drink, lord from outside?" a soft voice reproached Clark. It was Yala, the sister of Thargo, bending toward him, her slender white fingers extending a goblet of the black, thick wine. "Is our wine then so poor beside that of the outside world?"

Clark took the goblet, tasted the liquor. It was heady stuff, potent, strangely scented. Yala's languorous eyes approved as he drained the cup. An alert servant refilled it from a flagon.

"Aye, drink all!" boomed Thargo's powerful voice over the music. "Drink to the day that is almost here, the day when we of K'Lamm win at last to the shining waters that will make us all undying."

"To the day!" shouted the excited, half-intoxicated feasters, draining the

goblets and setting them down with a crash.

Clark Stannard felt sudden heady exaltation as he set down the goblet for the second time. The wine sang in his veins and suddenly life seemed wild, sweet, thrilling. It was good to have done with the old and outworn things of the world he had known, to sit here with this company in feast.

They were a good crowd, he thought warmly, as he drained the goblet again. They were making his men welcome, for now Mike Shinn was standing up and bellowing an Irish song, and they were laughing and applauding. Morrow was drinking heavily, silently, and the lank Texan had his arm around the girl next to him, and only Blacky Cain's dark, predatory face still remained watchful as the gangster sat there. What the deuce was Blacky so watchful about?—everyone here was their friend.

Thargo's powerful face had a smile of complete friendliness on it. Damned good scout, Thargo—by heaven, he and his men would help Thargo conquer those superstitious Dordonans! And the girl Yala swaying languorously closer to him, perfumed white shoulders and breasts rising out of her red chiton like a great lily, brooding sweetness of her black eyes making Clark's swimming senses reel!

"Are many men of the outer world as hard and handsome of face as you, lord from outside?" she whispered.

"That may be," Clark laughed, "but of this I'm sure—no women of that outer world are as beautiful as you, princess."

Her eyes were melting as she swayed closer, and slender satin fingers touched and twined about his in electrical contact.

Then as he bent unsteadily toward Yala, Clark just glimpsed an upward, meaning flash of her dark eyes, directed at Thargo. It chilled instantly through the winy haze around Clark's brain.

Danger here! shouted an alarmed voice inside him. He realized suddenly how near he was to intoxication. That wine—he'd already tossed off three or four goblets of it. And Yala was proffering him another beaker of the black stuff, with a soft smile.

"Wine brings gracious compliments from you, lord from outside. I would hear more—so drink."

Clark took the goblet. But now his half-hazy brain raced. Yala was trying to get him drunk, that was certain, and from the glance he had intercepted, he knew it was at Thargo's orders.

Nevertheless he took the goblet. But as he raised it, Clark feigned a far greater dazedness than he felt, letting his gaze wander dully, making his tongue thick when he spoke.

"Shouldn't drink any more," he muttered thickly to the leaning princess. "Doesn't take much—to knock me out."

"But you do not wish, surely, to deprive me of further compliments?" Yala's red, ripe mouth pouted bewitchingly.

Clark laughed unsteadily, though inwardly he was cold and alert. "Never—never say no to a lady. Here's to your eyes!"

He drained the goblet. The heady wine made his half-numbed senses spin, but he resolutely kept his head. Yet he feigned now a complete intoxication, hurled the glass away with a drunken laugh.

"Yala, I could give you compliments all night," he said maudlinly. "You're most — most beautiful woman — ever lived."

As his eyelids pretended to droop, Clark caught again that significant glance from the girl to her brother. Then she was leaning, her warm breath whispering in his ears.

"Would you rather tell me these

things where there are not so many to listen, lord from outside?" she murmured.

"Sure, that's what we need—a little more quiet," Clark said sleepily. "My head, too—feels funny——"

"Come with me," she whispered softly. "I will take you where it is quiet—and where you can tell me all those things."

Her soft hand under his elbow impelled him to his feet. Clark swayed unsteadily, blinking owlishly over the torch-lit hall and the noisy, riotous feasters. His dulled gaze was really keenly alert. He perceived that Shinn and Link Wilson were at the height of merriment with their Red neighbors, and that Morrow was still drinking heavily. But Blacky Cain was still alert, could be depended on to watch the others.

None of the feasters, in the din of laughter, clinking goblets and shouting voices, noticed as Clark Stannard stumbled out of the hall with Yala half supporting him. Yet Clark glimpsed Thargo looking keenly after them.

He stumbled with the princess of K'Lamm down shadowy stone halls, and finally into a great chamber which breathed of femininity. Silken hangings of yellow were on the walls, in the soft light of low-burning torches. Across the room was a low, soft silken couch, and above it a great window looked across the starlit roofs of K'Lamm.

Yala spoke a few soft words, and the two submissive-looking girls who had hurried forward, hastily withdrew. The Red princess led Clark to the couch, and as he sat down unsteadily, looking heavily about, she poured more of the black wine from a flagon in the room.

She drank also, her dark eyes looking over the rim of the glass with an expression that, despite himself, stirred his blood. Then she held the glass to his lips, her fingertips caressing his cheek.

"Drink with me to our—friendship," she murmured.

Clark drank. His brain seemed to float inside his skull as the additional alcohol leaped into his blood, but every fiber in him was taut and alert. He blinked at Yala as though she was hard for him to see. She came temptingly closer to him.

"Does the wine make me look—more beautiful?" she asked provocatively. Her arms went softly around his neck.

"Don't need wine for that," muttered Clark. He set his lips against her half-opened ones, his hands tightening on her bare, perfumed shoulders.

He knew the kiss was as feigned on her part as on his own. But for all that, it was none the less wildly thrilling. Then as she drew back a little from his embrace, eyes searching his dazed-looking face, Yala asked him seductively.

"Lord, tell me—am I more beautiful than the Dordonan girl you took captive—Lurain?"

"Much—much more beautiful," stammered Clark, his eyelids drooping. "She's just—little wildcat."

"Has Lurain asked you and your men to help Dordona in the coming war?" Yala asked him swiftly. "Has she made any offers to get you to ally yourselves with Dordona?"

Now, Clark knew suddenly, he had discovered the reason for this subtle temptation by Yala. Thargo was suspicious! Suspicious that Clark might have agreed with the Dordonan girl to aid her people, that he might be intending to betray K'Lamm! Thargo had had this girl, one capable of tempting an angel, get him intoxicated to question him.

"Lurain has not asked me to help Dordona," Clark said thickly, his eyes closing, his body swaying sleepily against Yala. "I—wouldn't listen to her if she

did. The Dordonans she led tried to kill me and my men. We're—going to help Thargo conquer their city."

He heard the hiss of Yala's indrawn breath. Then she murmured softly, "You are tired, lord from outside. You must rest."

He let himself fall like a log onto the soft couch as she lowered him. Then he heard Yala stand up quickly. She bent over him as he lay with eyes closed, her breath warm on his face. He breathed in long snores, pretending heavy, drunken sleep.

Satisfied, Yala went to the door of the chamber and uttered a low call. Almost at once, Clark heard the tramp of heavier feet entering the chamber, two pairs of them. The first voice that spoke was Thargo's. He guessed the Red king had been waiting outside.

"You heard?" Yala was saying swiftly. "He is safely on our side—he will have nothing to do with Dordona."

"Yes, I heard," Thargo said. "I was suspicious because he would not give up the Dordonan princess to us. But no doubt he is keeping the girl for himself, simply because she is pretty."

"That half-boy fighting cat!" said Yala scornfully. "What would any man want with her?"

The voice of Thargo's companion interrupted. It was an age-cracked, ominous voice Clark guessed to be that of the withered old counsellor he had seen with Thargo when he had first met the Red king.

"Better to slay all these strangers tonight, by surprize, and make sure," he warned. "We of K'Lamm have more than enough force to conquer Dordona and win to the lake. We do not need the strangers' help."

"No, we will not slay them, Shama—not yet," Thargo said authoritatively. "Their weapons are powerful, from what Dral says. They might kill many of us before we slew them all, and that would be bad for the minds of our people at this time when we are on the very verge of our long-planned attack on Dordona. Besides, why not make use of these strangers to make our conquest even easier?

"This is what we shall do," he continued in a hard, rapid voice. "Four days from now, as we have planned, we ride to attack Dordona, and the strangers go with us. In the attack on the Black city, we will put them in the forefront. As soon as we have won Dordona and our way down to the Lake of Life lies clear and open, *then* we shall turn suddenly on the strangers and kill them all."

8. *The Fight at the Gate*

It was all Clark Stannard could do to keep his body from stiffening betrayingly as he lay in pretended drunken sleep, listening to those calmly treacherous words. Blind fury burned in him as he heard Thargo's callous plan to make use of him, then dispose of him. Yet he managed to preserve his appearance of intoxicated stupor. His muscles tensed as he heard Thargo's strong step come over to the couch, and he knew that the Red king was looking down at him.

"This drunken fool!" said Thargo contemptuously. "If he is a sample of the men of the outside world, they will not be hard for us to rule, once we have drunk of the lake and are immortal."

"Be not so sure," warned the old counsellor, Shama. "This man and his comrades have courage and cunning, or they could not have penetrated the death mountains no men ever came through before."

"He was not cunning enough," Thargo said scornfully, "to prevent a woman's eyes from making a sot of him. You did

well what I asked, my sister. In fact, the task did not seem distasteful to you."

"Perhaps not," Yala said with a soft laugh. "Fool he may be, but this man is —different. Until he and his men ride with your forces to Dordona four days hence, I think to find him amusing."

"That is your affair," Thargo said indifferently. "Best get him back to his chambers now before his men miss him. Shama and I return to the feast."

Clark heard the ruthless plotter and the aged counsellor leave. Then Yala bent over him, holding a pungent liquid to his nose and shaking him softly.

"Wake, lord from outside," she said tenderly. "You must not stay here longer —my brother would be angry."

Clark was careful to awake slowly, blinking and rubbing his eyes dazedly. "More wine," he muttered thickly. "Got to have more wine—so I can tell you—how beautiful you are——"

"You shall have opportunity for that in the next few days," Yala promised with a provocative smile. "You had best return to your chambers now and sleep, my lord. It seems that you are almost overcome by my beauty—or the wine!"

She went to the door and called, as Clark stumbled to his feet. A warrior in the crimson armor answered quickly.

"This soldier will conduct you to your chambers," Yala told him. "Until tomorrow, lord from outside."

Her fingers clung warmly to his in caressing promise. Clark nodded dazedly and staggered out into the hall. He stumbled with his guide by shadowy, torchlit corridors, up a stair to the upper floor. The warrior took him to the door of their chambers, bowed and left.

But Clark's apparently owlish gaze took in the fact that now there were a score of armored guards posted unobtrusively along the corridor outside their chambers. That showed that Thargo was still taking no chances—and that was going to make things difficult.

EPHRAIM QUELL looked up in surprize when Clark stumbled into the torchlit rooms and slammed the door. Quell's eyes ran over Clark's disordered hair and flushed face, and the girl Lurain, sitting taut as a trapped tigress in a chair, watched with bitter contempt.

"There's a Book that says, 'Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging,'" twanged Quell, his bony face condemnatory. "Figger you might ought to have read that, before you went down there."

"I'm not drunk," Clark rasped. "But I've found out a lot and it adds up to the total news that our lives are not worth a plugged nickel if we stay around here."

Quell jumped to his feet in alarm.

"Go down and get the others up here," Clark told him. "Don't appear too urgent about it—but *get* them!"

Ephraim Quell nodded tightly, and went out of the room. Clark Stannard went rapidly across the room to Lurain.

Clark's mind, racing at top speed ever since he had discovered Thargo's contemplated treachery, had hit upon a desperate plan. It was a hazardous one but the only one, as far as he could see, that would give him and his men a chance to reach the Lake of Life now.

To stay longer in K'Lamm would merely allow Thargo to make pawns of them and then kill them. There was but one other possible course of action by which they might win to the lake.

Lurain's blue eyes blazed hatred as Clark approached. To her amazement, he cut her bonds.

"Lurain, I must talk with you and talk fast," he said swiftly. "I've discovered that Thargo intends to kill me and my men, as soon as we've helped him conquer your city of Dordona."

"I am glad!" she blazed. "Now you

learn the full evil of these Red spawn. They will kill me, but you also will die."

"Listen, you and your men came spying on K'Lamm to learn when Thargo and his forces will attack your city, didn't you?" Clark demanded, heedless of her hate. "Well, I can tell you that. Thargo and his men will ride toward Dordona in four days."

"Four days?" whispered Lurain, her face suddenly going dead white. "But we did not dream he would attack so soon—my people will be surprized—he will overwhelm Dordona!"

"Exactly," rasped Clark. "He will, unless we carry a warning to Dordona."

"You mean you strangers will help me escape, help me warn Dordona?" the girl exclaimed, with sudden desperate hope.

"We will," Clark said grimly, "and what is more, we will fight on the side of Dordona in the coming battle. You have seen how powerful our weapons are—it may be that our help will turn the tide against K'Lamm. But, for all this, there is a price."

"What price, for your aid?" Lurain demanded.

"The price," Clark told her, "is this: that when we reach Dordona, you shall take me down the pit to the Lake of Life, so that I may fill a flask with its shining waters to take back to the world outside. For that price, I and my men will aid your people."

"No!" flamed Lurain, leaping erect, her face blazing with wrath. "By the sun, never will I pay that price! Ages on ages have we of Dordona faithfully obeyed the commandments given us long ago by the Guardians below. Never have we permitted one blasphemer to descend to the lake. To allow you to do so would be supreme sacrilege. I reject your proposal. I would rather die!"

"But Dordona will die too, if it is not warned," Clark pointed out. "Yes, all its people will perish when Thargo leads the armies to K'Lamm into the city in surprize attack. And then Thargo will be able to descend to the lake and drink of it."

"The Guardians are there and will destroy Thargo and his horde if they dare descend," Lurain retorted fiercely.

"Are you so sure the Guardians are there?" Clark said. "Are you sure they exist? None in your city has seen them for ages."

"The Guardians are there!" Complete, unshakable faith of generations rang in the girl's voice. "Though Thargo and his spawn doubt their existence, they exist and still ward the sacred lake. Their powers are vast and they will slay any who approaches the lake, doubt it not."

"But then, why not agree to let me descend to the lake?" Clark pressed quickly. "If the Guardians are there, they will not let me touch the shining waters anyway, will they? The blame will not be yours, for you warned me. And by agreeing to let me go down there, you will save Dordona from surprize and death."

Lurain's face expressed doubt, hesitation, agony for her imperilled city. Clark hung on her answer. He was hoping the girl's blind faith in the legended Guardians of the lake was strong enough so that she would agree to let him go, as she supposed, to his death.

She said finally, her voice low and shaken, "It is true that the Guardians will kill you when you descend to the lake. The sin of letting you descend there will be on my soul. But—Dordona will be warned in time to prepare for Thargo's attack.

"Yes, I agree," she continued with desperate resolution on her face. "Help me escape from K'Lamm, promise to give my city your help in the coming war, and when we reach Dordona I will show

you how you may descend the sacred shaft."

"Good!" Clark exclaimed, his heart quickening with excitement. "Now if we can just get safely out of K'Lamm——"

THE door opened, and Ephraim Quell grimly entered, followed by Clark's other four followers. Mike Shinn was fighting drunk, bawling a song, his battered face glistening. Link Wilson too was flushed with wine, but Lieutenant Morrow and Blacky Cain were sober—the first because the drink had not affected him, the second from abstinence.

"What's the lay, chief?" rasped Blacky. "Something wrong?"

"A lot wrong," Clark snapped. He told them in curt sentences of Thargo's plot. A vicious oath ripped from the gangster.

"Double-crossing us, eh? We'll go down and put the blast on him, damn him!"

"Sure, I'll choke the dirty scut with me bare hands!" raged Mike Shinn furiously.

"Listen," Clark rapped, "we'll have all we can do to escape this trap without bothering for revenge on Thargo. We're going to get out of here, at once—and join the people of Dordona."

Rapidly he told them of the agreement he had made with Lurain. The Dordonan girl stood tense and pale as he talked.

"It's a great idea!" exclaimed Blacky. The gangster laughed. "We'll hand Thargo a double-cross, and when we get to this other burg, Dordona, we can easy lift the water from the lake below."

"How are we going to get out of K'Lamm?" Lieutenant Morrow asked quickly. "How out of this palace, even?"

"We can't go down through the palace itself," Clark said emphatically. "The guards posted out there in the corridor would give the alarm. There's the way we'll have to take out."

He pointed to one of the big, open windows, that looked out across the dark city and the starry sky.

"We'll slide down from that window on a rope of some kind," Clark said quickly. "Behind the palace I noticed a court where the horses of the palace guards are evidently kept at night. If we can sneak back there and get mounts, we'll make a dash out through the city."

"That's the idea," approved Link Wilson, his eyes lighting. "We can ride right out through these *hombres*."

"What if the gates of the city wall are closed?" Morrow asked.

Clark shrugged. "I don't think they will be. I doubt if they close those gates every night—this city fears no attack from Dordona."

The six adventurers acted rapidly. While Ephraim Quell listened watchfully at the door, Clark and the others tore down the wall hangings and converted them into heavy, knotted rope. They tied the end of the rope to a heavy chest, then dropped it into the darkness outside.

The men quickly shouldered their packs. Clark peered from the window. There were no sentries in the palace yard immediately beneath, though he heard movement of some at the front of the building. The walled courts in the rear of the palace were silent except for an occasional stamping of the restless horses back there.

CLARK hung for a moment, transfixed by the weird beauty of the scene. The moon was rising above the mountain wall in the east, a flood of silvery light pouring across the prisoned land. And bathed in the moon slept the city K'Lamm, a sea of dully gleaming roofs and streets and squares. Solemn and

somber bulked the dark mountains, crouched above the city. Then Clark Stannard snapped out of the spell.

"Come on, that moonlight will make it harder for us," he whispered urgently. "Lurain, you follow me closely."

"Yes, Stannar," she whispered, approximating as closely as she could the name she had heard the others call him.

Clark swung over the stone window-rail and slid softly down the knotted rope through the moonlight, to the ground. He poised there in the shadow, gun in hand. No sound broke the sleeping hush.

Now Lurain was following, her black metal-mesh tunic gleaming in the silver moon. Mike Shinn and Lieutenant Morrow came after, and in a moment they all stood in the shadow of the looming palace wall, their pistols glinting in their hands.

They moved at once toward the rear of the sleeping palace, stepping soundlessly on the stone paving. There seemed no guards outside the big building. Neither were there any outside the broad wooden door of the walled horse-court. The door creaked, and they slipped inside.

There were a score of horses in the court, and as the strangers entered, the animals stamped nervously, tossed their heads suspiciously in the moonlight. Clark's gaze searched the court desperately. But it was Link Wilson who spotted the saddles and bridles, hanging on a rail at one side of the court. Quickly they grasped these and approached the restless horses.

The horses snorted, stamped, wheeled away with hoofs ringing loudly on the paving. Clark cursed inwardly as they again approached the nervous steeds. Link Wilson talked to the horses in a low, soothing monotone as he advanced. The ex-cowboy was soon saddling one of them, and Morrow too and also Lurain had got others to stand still. Clark noticed that the girl worked as silently and swiftly as any of the men, her face showing no particle of fear in the silver light. His heart warmed again to her proud, unwavering courage.

He got one of the restive horses by the mane, and quickly attached the high, queer saddle and the rude bridle. Quell also managed to saddle one, but Mike Shinn and Blacky were having the devil's own time, hanging onto horses that had begun to plunge and rear.

"Help Mike, Link," whispered Clark quickly to the Texan. As the other obeyed, Clark hurried to aid the gangster, leading his own saddled steed.

"This damned goat has got the devil himself in him!" whispered Blacky furiously as Clark reached him. "I wish we had a good eight-cylinder jaloppy for the getaway, instead of these plugs."

Clark grabbed the saddle from the gangster and threw it over the plunging, rearing animal.

"Guards!" cried Lurain suddenly, her silver voice stabbing.

Clark whirled, still holding the mane of the plunging horse. Two armored guards, attracted by the commotion in the horse-court, stood framed in the half-opened door, staring. Then with a yell of alarm, drawing their swords, they rushed forward.

Blacky Cain's automatic sprang into his hand, and with a snarl on his lips, the gangster shot. The reports cracked in close succession and the two charging soldiers fell in heaps.

"That ties it!" cried the gangster. "Now we got to crash our way out!"

"More guards come," called Lurain's high voice, completely calm and unfearful but urgent, as she snatched up one of the swords of the fallen men.

The yell of alarm had been repeated

near the looming palace, and there was a clank of running men. Clark Stannard fought furiously to tie the girths of the struggling horse. He finally succeeded, and then he yelled to Blacky Cain.

"Here you are! Mount at once, all of you!"

Now an uproar was spreading through the whole pile of the hexagonal palace, and shouts and clash of arms could be heard from all around it, converging on the horse-court.

Clark swung into the saddle. As he jerked the reins to control the rearing animal, he saw that outside the horse-court a scattered body of twenty or thirty Red guards were rushing forward with drawn swords gleaming in the moonlight.

"We'll have to break out through them!" Clark yelled. "Ride!"

And he dug his heels into his steed's flanks. The nervous animal needed no further urging, and sprang forward toward the door with hoofs clanging on the pavement. Right beside Clark rode Link Wilson, the Texan sitting easily in the saddle, the rest thundering after.

Straight into the scattered band of guards at the door of the court they rode. Clark glimpsed their drawn swords, then heard the boom of a gun beside him, over the din of hoofs and yells. Link Wilson had drawn one of his forty-fives and was shooting as they charged. Three of the guards slumped down as the heavy slugs hit them.

They crashed through the other guards, a mad whirlwind of riders and steeds, the soldiers and stabbing swords seeming to spin around them. Then, with the swiftness of a cinema film, they were through the soldiers, riding full tilt around the big palace toward the great avenue that led to the city wall.

Other guards ran wildly out from the palace, swords raised in the moonlight. Clark had his own gun out now and fired, and heard Link Wilson's pistol booming again. He saw Lurain bending low over her mount's neck and slashing at a guard whose spear struck toward her. The man went down and she rode right over him, and the little band raced clattering down the wide street of the awakening city.

"The spawn of K'Lamm cannot stand against us, Stannar!" cried Lurain's silver, pealing voice as she rode.

"Yippee!" yelled Link Wilson, the ex-cowboy, drunk with reckless excitement as his horse galloped furiously over the paving.

"The whole city is rousing!" shouted Lieutenant Morrow, spurring his horse beside Clark's.

They thundered down that wide dark street to the accompaniment of mad yells of rage from behind them, and startled cries along the street. A few men ran out as though to intercept them, but recoiled abruptly as the desperate little band rode down on them.

Clanging of hoofs on stone, chorus of yells and orders, were wild music in Clark Stannard's ears as he and his men and the Dordonan girl thundered down the street of moonlit K'Lamm. He saw torches flickering and bobbing ahead of them.

"Look!" yelled Ephraim Quell suddenly over the din. "The gates——"

"Faster!" cried Clark wildly, as he saw at what the Yankee skipper pointed.

The great gates in the city wall had been open, as Clark had guessed. But now, alarmed by the clamor at the distant palace, the guards around those gates were hastily pushing against the mighty bronze valves, were *closing* them.

9. Dordona

IF THEY close those gates, we're trapped!" yelled Clark.

They spurred desperately forward. From the guard-towers on either side of the gate, several dozen soldiers had run out and formed a line in front of the gate. Behind that line, a half-dozen other Red warriors were slowly forcing the great valves shut.

"Ride through them!" Clark shouted. "It's now or never."

They crashed into that solid line of guards—and stopped! For these soldiers grabbed their bridles and stirrups and clung to them, holding them, stabbing at them with their swords. The crazed horses whirled and plunged in a mad inferno of struggle, the riders rising like swimmers above a wave of armored men and slashing swords.

Clark felt a blade sear along his forearm, and glimpsed the brutal face of the Red warrior stabbing at him. His gun kicked in his hand and the man fell with his forehead driven in. Clark shot again, trying to clear away the men clinging to his bridle. Link Wilson's heavy gun was booming, while Blacky Cain, his eyes blazing and a frozen killer mask on his face, was viciously shooting the men trying to pull him down.

"Dordona! Dordona!" pealed a silver cry from the girl Lurain, wielding her sword with wildcat swiftness and fury.

The gates were almost closed! And from far back at the palace of Thargo, masses of soldiers were coming on the run. Clark had a cold, sinking sense that they were trapped. Then he heard a hoarse cry.

"Out of my way, you scum!" Ephraim Quell shouted, forcing through his attackers, clubbing his reversed gun on their heads.

Quell broke through them. Clark saw the bony Yankee skipper break through on his mount to the half-dozen men who now had pushed the gates within a foot of closing. Ephraim Quell's gun-butt smashed down among them, sent them reeling, his horse trampling them. The Yankee leaped from his horse, swiftly pulled on one of the great valves.

He pulled it open a few yards, by frenzied, tremendous effort. But the men he had scattered were on their feet again, rushing at him and stabbing with their swords. Quell reeled back from them.

Clark shouted, his voice ringing over the mad din, and the others heard and pushed desperately forward. The horses, maddened by the struggle to the pitch of frenzy, surged forward crazily toward the gate-opening that promised freedom, trampling down the clinging guards.

Clark's gun blazed the last of its clip, and the men stabbing at Quell fell. Link Wilson spurred in, grabbed the Yankee skipper's horse, helped haul the bony seaman up onto it. Then before the guards they had broken through could reach them again, their horses were bolting out through the opened gates. Wild from the battle and unaccustomed gunfire, they plunged for freedom, Clark's and Lurain's steeds jamming momentarily in the narrow opening.

Then they were all out in the open moonlight of the plain, the dark walls and confusion and raging shouts of K'Lamm behind them. Plunging, racing, snorting, the horses galloped wildly over the moonlit sea of grass and brush. The wild uproar of the Red city receded swiftly.

"Which way to Dordona?" cried Clark to Lurain, shouting to her over the rush of wind.

"We follow the way now," she cried. "Due east from here it lies—we go to the river, and along it to my city."

Now the horses were settling to a

steady, rushing lope as their frenzy of panic quieted a little. Clark turned in the saddle, but there was no sign of pursuit as yet from K'Lamm.

But none of them had escaped unscathed. Mike Shinn had a bleeding cut on his forehead; Blacky Cain had one sleeve slashed to ribbons; the rest all had small cut or stab wounds. Only Ephraim Quell, riding grimly forward with jacket buttoned tightly against the wind, appeared to have escaped without injury.

Clark leaned toward the Dordonan girl riding close beside him. Lurain had a cut across one bare knee, but it was not serious. As they galloped, she looked tautly back to where K'Lamm had dropped from sight in the moonlight.

"They will try to follow but they cannot trail us by night, and they dare not go too close to Dordona in small parties," she said. Then she laughed. "I would like to see Thargo's face now."

Ahead in the dim moonlight there soon loomed vaguely a long, low line of dark trees. It marked the river, and they reached it in a quarter-hour. The dull roar of the stream was loud, as it raced with the swiftness of a mountain-flume toward Dordona.

As they rode along it, heading east, the first gray streak of dawn showed ahead. Clark's hopes were soaring. Every beat of the hoofs brought them nearer to Dordona, where lay the pit that was entrance to the Lake of Life. He'd yet succeed in reaching it—he had the girl's word now that he could descend to it.

EPHRAIM QUELL suddenly toppled stiffly from his horse. They reined in hastily and Clark ran to the Yankee's side. Quell's bony face was a ghastly, stiff mask, his eyes closed. From under his coat welled a dark stain, and when Clark ripped the coat open, he saw that beneath it had been concealed two deep sword-wounds.

"Good God! Quell was badly wounded when he kept the gate from closing, but he said nothing to us!" Clark exclaimed.

Ephraim Quell's glazed eyes flickered at Clark's drawn, tense countenance. A smile glimmered in them.

"I'm—'bout ready to cast anchor," Quell muttered. "Felt the life running out of me, as I rode——"

"Quell, you're not dying!" Clark said desperately. "We'll get you to Dordona, and pull you through."

"No, I'm done for," whispered the seaman. "And—I don't mind. Ever since my ship burned and they took my certificate, I—haven't cared much about living."

His glazed eyes fixed on the eastern sky, pale with dawn. A cool breeze had begun to blow from there, stirring the grass. The Yankee skipper's lips moved, almost inaudibly.

"Fair skies and a good wind — today——" he whispered. Then his head lolled laxly, his eyes dull, dead.

Clark let him down and got to his feet. There was a hard lump in his throat but he made his voice harsh.

"Mike—Blacky—keep a watch to the south and west. Link and Morrow and I will bury him."

In the paling dawn, they scooped a grave under a tree beside the roaring river, using a little camp-spade from one of the packs. White mists of morning made everything unreal as they put Ephraim Quell's stiff body into the shallow grave, and covered it.

"Mount! Forward!" Clark ordered.

Again they galloped, hoofs thudding above the river roar, bearing them on through swirling white mists.

"I'm kind of glad," said Link Wilson's drawling voice finally, "that we buried him where he can hear water."

"Yeah," muttered Mike Shinn. "Quell was a good guy. He was a *great* guy."

An hour later, Lurain suddenly reined in her horse and pointed eagerly ahead. "There is Dordona!"

Five miles ahead rose the eastern wall of the great crater, the mighty, looming barrier of the mountains. Close under the frowning cliffs brooded ancient, crumbling Dordona. Black, silent, brooding like a withered ancient who has long ago fallen from greatness, it lay in the chill white mists, strange contrast to the city from which they had come.

Behind the black battlements of an encircling wall whose top had crumbled at places, rose a mass of antique towers and roofs of dull black stone, weathered by the winds and rains of ages. Under a water-gate in the dilapidated wall ran the roaring, mill-race river they had followed. It ran straight toward a building at the center of the city, a huge black dome that towered two hundred feet into the air.

The gates in the black wall were pushed open as they approached. Soldiers in black armor waved their swords in the air and yelled joyful greetings to Lurain, riding now at the head of the little troop. And as they rode on into the city, from somber, crumbling buildings poured men and women with shouts of gladness.

"Lurain! The princess Lurain has returned!" they shouted.

Clark Stannard, looking about keenly, saw that indeed Dordona had long passed the zenith of its glory. Many of the black stone buildings were untenanted, falling to ruins. Green grass grew between the blocks of black paving in the streets.

And the people pouring forth were not nearly so numerous as the Reds, he saw. Clark sensed despair under their momentary joy, read hopelessness on their pale faces, the hopelessness of great fear.

"Say, we'll be the white-haired boys in this joint for bringing back the girl," Mike Shinn said happily.

"There aren't enough men here to defend this city properly," Lieutenant Morrow told Clark keenly. "The place is too big now for its population, and the wall hasn't been kept up."

Clark nodded grimly. "From what Thargo said, the population of this place has been steadily dwindling for a long time."

"We go to the Temple of the Shaft," Lurain called to Clark. "My father, the lord Kimor, will be there."

They rode after her toward the huge, black-domed temple that brooded at the center of the city. It loomed massively in front of them, incomparably the largest and most ancient building they had seen in this land. For it was old, the stone paving in front of it worn deep by ages of tramping feet, its slot-windows crumbling at the edges.

GUARDS took their horses, and swung open the high bronze doors of the temple. Lurain led the way inside, her slim, boyish figure striding with her sheathed sword rattling on the stone floor. Clark and his men, following her inside, paused for a moment, thunderstruck.

The interior of the temple was one colossal room, dim and dusky and vast, its only illumination shafts of sunlight from the slot-like windows. And it was throbbing and quivering to a thunder of bellowing sound that was deafening, an unbroken, tremendous roar of waters.

The racing river from outside ran right into the temple, through a gap in one wall. The waters rushed with blinding speed across the floor of the vast room, in a deep, wide canal, toward a round, black opening a hundred feet across that yawned at the center of the floor. Into this gaping abyss, the river tumbled with a reverberating thunder.

Clark and his men moved nearer the pit, stood on the very edge of the abyss. He peered down into an impenetrable darkness that seemed to go down to the bowels of the earth. He could make out that the vertical sides of the pit were of rough rock, in which had been carved the steps of a narrow, spiraling stair. The head of this stair was closed by a barred gate guarded by Black warriors. And the raging cataract of waters, leaping out over the edge of the pit, tumbled down its center in a tremendous waterfall, dropping into the dark.

"Good God! *this* must be the way down to the cavern far below—to the Lake of Life!" exclaimed Clark, stupefiedly.

"Say, I don't hanker to go down there," said Mike Shinn, awed. "It looks to me like the doorway down to purgatory."

Lurain was coming around the edge of the pit now, bringing with her a half-dozen Dordonan men in black armor.

"My father, Stannar!" she said.

Clark turned to confront Kimor, the ruler of Dordona.

Kimor was sixty years old, at least, a tall, arrow-straight, superbly muscled man with white hair and pointed white beard, and fierce, shaggy white eyebrows over keen, watchful blue eyes.

"Strangers, you are welcome!" he told Clark. "My daughter has told me how you helped her escape K'Lamm and bring us warning of the attack which Thargo plans for three days hence. We expected no attack for weeks—there is hardly time to prepare.

"We of Dordona will be grateful for your help in the coming battle," Kimor continued. "Lurain informs me you are from outside the mountains, and bear weapons of great and strange power. You can aid us much, and any reward we can give you will be yours."

"Why, we ask but one reward," Clark said, looking puzzledly at Lurain. "It is what I told your daughter—that we be allowed to go down that stair in the pit to the Lake of Life, and bring back a flask of its waters. For that reward, we have joined you."

Kimor's fierce face turned dead-white as he heard. His eyes blazed fire of outraged, fanatical fury, and he ripped out his sword from its sheath. And from the Dordonans behind him came wrathful, raging cries as they too drew their weapons, their faces contorted.

"You ask *that?*" thundered Kimor to Clark. "You ask leave from us to commit the supreme sacrilege that no man may commit and live? Your very request is a sacrilege to this Temple of the Shaft! Nobles of Dordona, kill these men for their blasphemy!"

10. Down the Stair

BLACKY CAIN'S gun leaped into his hands, and the others followed his example swiftly as the Dordonan warriors leaped forward with upraised swords, wild wrath on their faces.

"Don't shoot!" Clark yelled tensely.

For Lurain had sprung in front of the charging nobles and her fanatical father, halting them with an urgent gesture.

"Wait!" she cried. "These are strangers from outside our land—they do not know that it is blasphemy they speak. They will not ask for such a thing when they understand that it is a sacrilege."

"So this," Clark grated to the girl, "is how you keep the bargain you made with me!"

"I do not understand you, stranger," she said coldly, and turned back to Kimor. "You will forgive their ignorance, father?"

"They should be slain for such blasphemy," said Kimor fiercely. But slowly,

reluctantly, he sheathed his sword, and said, "They are forgiven because they are strangers who know not the law. But let them repeat their blasphemy, let them even but glance at the sacred shaft, and it shall mean their deaths."

"Looks like the girl's double-crossed us," rasped Blacky Cain. "Shall we try to crash our way down into that pit? It looks like suicide to me to go down that damned stair, but we'll do it if you say."

"Put away your guns," Clark said quickly to the gangster and the others. "There are too many of them here for us, and the whole city would come running. Later on, we may be able to enter the pit."

Then he turned back to Kimor and Lurain. The girl showed no sign of emotion as she met his bitterly accusing gaze.

"We withdraw our request, since it is against your law," Clark told the fierce old Dordonan ruler.

"Well that you do," said Kimor grimly, "for I tell you no man for ages has been permitted to enter the sacred shaft."

He continued, "You shall be given a dwelling for your use, and food and wine. If you wish to help us against the Reds, your help is welcome. But whether you help or not, you cannot go near this pit. You are forbidden from now on to enter this temple, under pain of death."

"We understand," Clark said tightly. His gaze again sought Lurain's face, charged with his bitter scorn.

Two of the black-armored warriors, at Kimor's command, led Clark and his men out of the temple. They conducted them along the crumbling streets, whose occupants watched the strangers curiously.

Clark's thoughts were bitter. Lurain had tricked him neatly—had had no intention of fulfilling the promise she had made him. They were here in Dordona, but as far from the shining lake as ever.

The two Dordonan guides left them outside a weathered, one-story building of black stone, with a promise that food and drink would be brought them. The interior of the building, they found when they entered, was one of dark, gloomy rooms, its furniture and floor covered with dust, everything here exuding antiquity.

"Just as lief bed down in a mausoleum!" grunted Mike Shinn in disgust as he tossed his pack into a corner and sat down.

"What," Lieutenant Morrow asked Clark keenly, "are we going to do now?"

"We're going to get into that pit, somehow, by force or stealth," Clark declared. "We'll wait until tonight, steal into the temple, and overpower the guards at the head of the stair. Then we can get down the shaft, and I think they're too superstitious to pursue us."

"But they'll be waitin' for us when we come back up," reminded Link Wilson. "That is, if we do come back up."

"It will be up to us then to fight our way through them," Clark said grimly. He added bitterly, "Lurain broke her bargain with us; so our promise to help them in the coming war no longer holds. If we get back up with the flask of water from the lake, we'll get out of Dordona as soon as we can."

THE day passed slowly. Clark Stannard and his men went out into the streets of the crumbling black city for a time. Apparently they sauntered idly, but in reality were mapping a route to the temple, one that they could follow with less chance of being observed. He noticed the Dordonan people now shunned them, looking at them in half-veiled hate. News of their blasphemy had apparently spread in the city.

Night fell, and Clark watched the moon rise over the ancient city. Then after some hours had passed, he led the

others into the dark back rooms of their dwelling, intending to slip out that way. But as he entered the darkness there, he glimpsed a moving figure in the blackness. Instantly he leaped at the other, grasped him by the throat.

"It's a spy!" he grated. "If they've found out what we're planning, we're sunk." And he rasped in the language of Dordona to his prisoner, "One shout and you die."

"Release me — I will not shout," gasped a voice.

"Lurain!" he exclaimed. "What in the world——"

He dragged the girl over to one of the windows, where the moonlight illuminated her white, strange face and distended eyes.

"What are you doing, spying on us?" Clark demanded, his face hardening as he remembered.

"No, I came to fulfill the promise I made you, to lead you down to the holy lake!" she gasped. Her words poured forth in a torrent as Clark stood in stunned surprize. "Stannar, why did you tell my father Kimor you wished to descend to the lake? That was madness!"

"But you had promised me that you would see that I got down the shaft," Clark said bewilderedly.

"You do not understand," Lurain told him. "I made that promise, yes—but what I meant was that I would secretly take you down the shaft; for if my father knew of it he would slay us instantly for the sacrilege—yes, even me, his daughter. I thought you understood that and would be silent about the lake until I could fulfill my promise."

"Lord, I've misjudged you, Lurain," Clark told her impulsively. "Come to think of it, it was rather asinine of me to blurt out my whole business without making sure how things stood. But I hadn't had time to think, I guess, in the rush of our escape."

"And I had to pretend ignorance when you reproached me," she said. "But I have come now, Stannar. I shall fulfill my promise and take you down to the cavern of the Lake of Life. The sin will be on my head, not on my father and people. And my sin will be expiated, for surely the Guardians will slay us down there for our sacrilege."

She was trembling violently, though her voice was steady. Clark Stannard stared at her, frowning.

"You believe that?—believe we're both going to die down there, Lurain? And yet you're willing to keep your promise?"

"Yes," the girl told him. "I gave you my word, and you brought warning to Dordona as you promised. My death matters not."

Clark suddenly put his arms around her, and as he held her quivering figure he could feel the pounding of her heart.

"Lurain, you're not going to die—neither of us will die," he told her reassuringly. "There are no Guardians down there—that is legend only. Even if they were there, I have my weapon."

She said nothing, but he knew she was convinced of the futility of all human weapons against those mysterious warders. He turned to his four men, who had listened tensely in the dark room.

"You'll stay here," Clark told them. "I should be back by morning with the waters from the lake, if all goes well."

"Why don't we go with you?" Blacky demanded.

But when Lurain understood the question, she shook her head. "No, I promised but to take you, Stannar. Your men would only be destroyed down there as we will be, and their help will be needed here when Thargo comes to attack Dordona."

"Remember, you're bound by my

promise to help these Blacks against Thargo," Clark told his men, "whether or not I return."

Then Clark brought from his pack the leaden flask he had brought so far, along such a dangerous trail in preparation for this time. He paused then for a moment, before the silent quartet.

"Good luck, boys, if I don't come back," he said.

"The same to you, chief, and it's me thinks you're going to need it," muttered Mike Shinn, as they shook hands.

"We go out the back of this dwelling," whispered Lurain, to Clark. "Follow me —and be very silent."

He emerged with her into the checkered moonlight and shadow of one of Dordona's silent streets. The girl, he saw now, carried a short, pointed metal bar. She led by deserted alleys of crumbling ruins, not toward the great temple, but toward a ruined, deserted stone building a quarter-mile from the great dome.

CLARK followed her wonderingly into the ruin. She led across a room strewn with debris of crumbling stone, and knelt on the corner of the stone floor. He knelt puzzledly beside her, turning his tiny flashlight beam on the weathered blocks of the floor.

"Dig out these blocks," whispered Lurain, pointing to the floor. "I will hold the light."

"But I don't——" Clark began, then halted and obeyed. It was evident that Lurain knew what she was about.

With the metal bar she had brought, he soon dug out four of the big blocks. There was revealed beneath them a dark, burrow-like opening in the earth, the mouth of a horizontal underground passage. Lurain dropped quickly down into this, and Clark followed. Turning his beam, he discovered the passage was shoulder-high, extending away through the solid rock.

"This passage," Lurain whispered, "was dug secretly many generations ago, by plotters in the city who wished to reach the pit and go down the stairs to the Lake of Life. They were of the rebels of that time who finally left Dordona to found the city K'Laram. They could not enter the pit from the temple, for the stair-head there is always guarded, as you saw. So they dug this passage, opening into the pit below.

"Just as they finished their sacrilegious work," she continued, "their plot was detected. They were slain before they could make use of the passage, and it was blocked up and its existence kept secret. But the rulers of Dordona have known of it, and as daughter of the present ruler I knew of it. It is the one way we can enter the pit, for if we tried to enter it in the temple, the guards there would kill us at once."

Clark's hopes bounded. "Let's get on, then."

He led the way, flashing his beam ahead. As they advanced in the passage, they heard a dull roar that became louder and louder. Clark knew it was the sound of the cataract falling into the sacred shaft, and his excitement increased. Lurain, pressing on behind him, was shivering.

They reached the end of the passage. They crouched, petrified by the stupefying view ahead. The opening in which they crouched was twenty feet below the floor of the temple, in the rock side of the stupendous pit. Right below and outside this opening lay the narrow steps of the spiraling stone stair.

Out there in the pit, not ten yards from them, there gleamed in the faint light from above the falling waters of the thundering cataract, the river from far away that tumbled headlong down into this un-

guessable abyss. Its roar seemed to shatter their ears, and its flying spray was cold on their white faces.

Clark gripped his nerves and crawled out onto the stone steps. The steps were not four feet wide, grown with the slimy green moss of ages, drenched and dripping with spray. Looking up, he could just glimpse the moonlit interior of the great temple, could just see the heads of the armored guards on duty at the head of the stair.

Looking down, he could see nothing—nothing but an unplumbed abyss of darkness into which the waters tumbled, and round whose side dropped the coils of the spiral stair. Clark's nerves shrank, appalled for the moment from the thought of venturing down into that enigmatic gulf, along that slippery, ancient way. Then his jaw set in renewed resolution. Below lay what he had come so far to seek.

"Lurain, we go downward now," he told the girl, raising his voice over the roar. "Would you rather wait here?"

"No, Stannar—I go with you," she cried. "My promise was to lead you to the lake itself."

Cautiously, every nerve strung taut, Clark stepped downward, feeling with his foot for the next step. He dared not use the flashlight here, so near the surface. The wet, mossy stone was slippery under his feet, threatening to send him slipping and sliding off the unrailed stair. Sick dizziness swept him as he visualized himself plunging downward, racing those tumbling waters in a nightmare fall.

Now he and Lurain had followed the spiral stair twice around the falling cataract, were deeper below the surface. They were in almost complete darkness. Spray stung their cheeks, gusty air-currents howled up the great shaft, the thunder of the falling waters beside them was brain-numbing. Still down and down they crept, feeling for each slippery step, groping down through somber, eternal night toward the mystic Lake of Life and its legended warders.

You will not want to miss the thrilling chapters that bring this story to its close in next month's Weird Tales. Reserve your copy at your magazine dealer's now.

The Golgotha Dancers

By MANLY WADE WELLMAN

A curious and terrifying story about an artist who sold his soul that he might paint a living picture

I HAD come to the Art Museum to see the special show of Goya prints, but that particular gallery was so crowded that I could hardly get in, much less see or savor anything; wherefore I walked out again. I wandered through the other wings with their rows and rows of oils, their Greek and Roman sculptures, their stern racks of medieval armors, their Oriental porcelains, their Egyptian gods. At length by chance and not by design, I came to the head of a certain rear stairway. Other habitués of the museum will know the one I mean when I remind them that Arnold Bocklin's *The Isle of the Dead* hangs on the wall of the landing.

I started down, relishing in advance the impression Böcklin's picture would make with its high brown rocks and black poplars, its midnight sky and gloomy film of sea, its single white figure erect in the bow of the beach-nosing skiff. But, as I descended, I saw that *The Isle of the Dead* was not in its accustomed position on the wall. In that space, arresting even in the bad light and from the up-angle of the stairs, hung a gilt-framed painting I had never seen or heard of in all my museum-haunting years.

I gazed at it, one will imagine, all the way down to the landing. Then I had a close, searching look, and a final appraising stare from the lip of the landing above the lower half of the flight. So far as I can learn—and I have been diligent in my research—the thing is unknown even to the best-informed of art experts. Perhaps it is as well that I describe it in detail.

It seemed to represent action upon a small plateau or table rock, drab and bare, with a twilight sky deepening into a starless evening. This setting, restrainedly worked up in blue-grays and blue-blacks, was not the first thing to catch the eye, however. The front of the picture was filled with lively dancing creatures, as pink, plump and naked as cherubs and as patently evil as the meditations of Satan in his rare idle moments.

I counted those dancers. There were twelve of them, ranged in a half-circle, and they were cavorting in evident glee around a central object—a prone cross, which appeared to be made of two stout logs with some of the bark still upon them. To this cross a pair of the pink things—that makes fourteen—kneeling and swinging blocky-looking hammers or mauls, spiked a human figure.

I say *human* when I speak of that figure, and I withhold the word in describing the dancers and their hammer-wielding fellows. There is a reason. The supine victim on the cross was a beautifully represented male body, as clear and anatomically correct as an illustration in a surgical textbook. The head was writhed around, as if in pain, and I could not see the face or its expression; but in the tortured tenseness of the muscles, in the slaty white sheen of the skin with jagged streaks of vivid gore upon it, agonized nature was plain and doubly plain. I

could almost see the painted limbs writhe against the transfixing nails.

By the same token, the dancers and hammerers were so dynamically done as to seem half in motion before my eyes. So much for the sound skill of the painter. Yet, where the crucified prisoner was all clarity, these others were all fog. No lines, no angles, no muscles—their features could not be seen or sensed. I was not even sure if they had hair or not. It was as if each was picked out with a ray of light in that surrounding dusk, light that revealed and yet shimmered indistinctly; light, too, that had absolutely nothing of comfort or honesty in it.

"HOLD on, there!" came a sharp challenge from the stairs behind and below me. "What are you doing? And what's that picture doing?"

I started so that I almost lost my footing and fell upon the speaker—one of the Museum guards. He was a slight old fellow and his thin hair was gray, but he advanced upon me with all the righteous, angry pluck of a beefy policeman. His attitude surprized and nettled me.

"I was going to ask somebody that same question." I told him as austerely as I could manage. "What about this picture? I thought there was a Böcklin hanging here."

The guard relaxed his forbidding attitude at first sound of my voice. "Oh, I beg your pardon, sir. I thought you were somebody else—the man who brought that thing." He nodded at the picture, and the hostile glare came back into his eyes. "It so happened that he talked to me first, then to the curator. Said it was art—great art—and the Museum must have it." He lifted his shoulders, in a shrug or a shudder. "Personally, I think it's plain beastly."

So it was, I grew aware as I looked at it again. "And the Museum has accepted it at last?" I prompted.

He shook his head. "Oh, no, sir. An hour ago he was at the back door, with that nasty daub there under his arm. I heard part of the argument. He got insulting, and he was told to clear out and take his picture with him. But he must have got in here somehow, and hung it himself." Walking close to the painting, as gingerly as though he expected the pink dancers to leap out at him, he pointed to the lower edge of the frame. "If it was a real Museum piece, we'd have a plate right there, with the name of the painter and the title."

I, too, came close. There was no plate, just as the guard had said. But in the lower left-hand corner of the canvas were sprawling capitals, pale paint on the dark, spelling out the word *GOLGOTHA*. Beneath these, in small, barely readable script:

I sold my soul that I might paint a living picture.

No signature or other clue to the artist's identity.

The guard had discovered a great framed rectangle against the wall to one side. "Here's the picture he took down," he informed me, highly relieved. "Help me put it back, will you, sir? And do you suppose," here he grew almost wistful, "that we could get rid of this other thing before someone finds I let the crazy fool slip past me?"

I took one edge of *The Isle of the Dead* and lifted it to help him hang it once more.

"Tell you what," I offered on sudden impulse; "I'll take this *Golgotha* piece home with me, if you like."

"Would you do that?" he almost yelled out in his joy at the suggestion. "Would you, to oblige me?"

"To oblige myself," I returned. "I need another picture at my place."

And the upshot of it was, he smuggled me and the unwanted painting out of the Museum. Never mind how. I have done quite enough as it is to jeopardize his job and my own welcome up there.

It was not until I had paid off my taxi and lugged the unwieldy parallelogram of canvas and wood upstairs to my bachelor apartment that I bothered to wonder if it might be valuable. I never did find out, but from the first I was deeply impressed.

Hung over my own fireplace, it looked as large and living as a scene glimpsed through a window or, perhaps, on a stage in a theater. The capering pink bodies caught new lights from my lamp, lights that glossed and intensified their shape and color but did not reveal any new details. I pored once more over the cryptic legend: *I sold my soul that I might paint a living picture.*

A living picture—was it that? I could not answer. For all my honest delight in such things, I cannot be called expert or even knowing as regards art. Did I even like the Golgotha painting? I could not be sure of that, either. And the rest of the inscription, about selling a soul; I was considerably intrigued by that, and let my thoughts ramble on the subject of Satanist complexes and the vagaries of half-crazy painters. As I read, that evening, I glanced up again and again at my new possession. Sometimes it seemed ridiculous, sometimes sinister. Shortly after midnight I rose, gazed once more, and then turned out the parlor lamp. For a moment, or so it seemed, I could see those dancers, so many dim-pink silhouettes in the sudden darkness. I went to the kitchen for a bit of whisky and water, and thence to my bedroom.

I had dreams. In them I was a boy again, and my mother and sister were leaving the house to go to a theater where —think of it!—Richard Mansfield would play *Beau Brummell.* I, the youngest, was told to stay at home and mind the troublesome furnace. I wept copiously in my disappointed loneliness, and then Mansfield himself stalked in, in full Brummell regalia. He laughed goldenly and stretched out his hand in warm greeting. I, the lad of my dreams, put out my own hand, then was frightened when he would not loosen his grasp. I tugged, and he laughed again. The gold of his laughter turned suddenly hard, cold. I tugged with all my strength, and woke.

Something held me tight by the wrist.

In my first half-moment of wakefulness I was aware that the room was filled with the pink dancers of the picture, in nimble, fierce-happy motion. They were man-size, too, or nearly so, visible in the dark with the dim radiance of fox-fire. On the small scale of the painting they had seemed no more than babyishly plump; now they were gross, like huge erect toads. And, as I awakened fully, they were closing in, a menacing ring of them, around my bed. One stood at my right side, and its grip, clumsy and rubbery-hard like that of a monkey, was closed upon my arm.

I saw and sensed all this, as I say, in a single moment. With the sensing came the realization of peril, so great that I did not stop to wonder at the uncanniness of my visitors. I tried frantically to jerk loose. For the moment I did not succeed and as I thrashed about, throwing my body nearly across the bed, a second dancer dashed in from the left. It seized and clamped my other arm. I felt, rather than heard, a wave of soft, wordless merriment from them all. My heart and sinews seemed to fail, and briefly I lay still in a daze of horror, pinned down crucifix-fashion between my two captors.

Was that a *hammer* raised above me as I sprawled?

There rushed and swelled into me the sudden startled strength that sometimes favors the desperate. I screamed like any wild thing caught in a trap, rolled somehow out of bed and to my feet. One of the beings I shook off and the other I dashed against the bureau. Freed, I made for the bedroom door and the front of the apartment, stumbling and staggering on fear-weakened legs.

One of the dim-shining pink things barred my way at the very threshold, and the others were closing in behind, as if for a sudden rush. I flung my right fist with all my strength and weight. The being bobbed back unresistingly before my smash, like a rubber toy floating through water. I plunged past, reached the entry and fumbled for the knob of the outer door.

They were all about me then, their rubbery palms fumbling at my shoulders, my elbows, my pajama jacket. They would have dragged me down before I could negotiate the lock. A racking shudder possessed me and seemed to flick them clear. Then I stumbled against a stand, and purely by good luck my hand fell upon a bamboo walking-stick. I yelled again, in truly hysterical fierceness, and laid about me as with a whip. My blows did little or no damage to those unearthly assailants, but they shrank back, teetering and dancing, to a safe distance. Again I had the sense that they were laughing, mocking. For the moment I had beaten them off, but they were sure of me in the end. Just then my groping free hand pressed a switch. The entry sprang into light.

On the instant they were not there.

SOMEBODY was knocking outside, and with trembling fingers I turned the knob of the door. In came a tall, slender girl with a blue lounging-robe caught hurriedly around her. Her bright hair was disordered as though she had just sprung from her bed.

"Is someone sick?" she asked in a breathless voice. "I live down the hall—I heard cries." Her round blue eyes were studying my face, which must have been ghastly pale. "You see, I'm a trained nurse, and perhaps——"

"Thank God you did come!" I broke in, unceremoniously but honestly, and went before her to turn on every lamp in the parlor.

It was she who, without guidance, searched out my whisky and siphon and mixed for me a highball of grateful strength. My teeth rang nervously on the edge of the glass as I gulped it down. After that I got my own robe—a becoming one, with satin facings—and sat with her on the divan to tell of my adventure. When I had finished, she gazed long at the painting of the dancers, then back at me. Her eyes, like two chips of the April sky, were full of concern and she held her rosy lower lip between her teeth. I thought that she was wonderfully pretty.

"What a perfectly terrible nightmare!" she said.

"It was no nightmare," I protested.

She smiled and argued the point, telling me all manner of comforting things about mental associations and their reflections in vivid dreams.

To clinch her point she turned to the painting.

"This line about a 'living picture' is the peg on which your slumbering mind hung the whole fabric," she suggested, her slender fingertip touching the painted scribble. "Your very literal subconscious self didn't understand that the artist meant his picture would live only figuratively."

"Are you sure that's what the artist meant?" I asked, but finally I let her con-

vince me. One can imagine how badly I wanted to be convinced.

She mixed me another highball, and a short one for herself. Over it she told me her name-- Miss Dolby—and finally she left me with a last comforting assurance. But, nightmare or no, I did not sleep again that night. I sat in the parlor among the lamps, smoking and dipping into book after book. Countless times I felt my gaze drawn back to the painting over the fireplace, with the cross and the nail-pierced wretch and the shimmering pink dancers.

After the rising sun had filled the apartment with its honest light and cheer I felt considerably calmer. I slept all morning, and in the afternoon was disposed to agree with Miss Dolby that the whole business had been a bad dream, nothing more. Dressing, I went down the hall, knocked on her door and invited her to dinner with me.

It was a good dinner. Afterward we went to an amusing motion picture, with Charles Butterworth in it as I remember. After bidding her good-night, I went to my own place. Undressed and in bed, I lay awake. My late morning slumber made my eyes slow to close. Thus it was that I heard the faint shuffle of feet and, sitting up against my pillows, saw the glowing silhouettes of the Golgotha dancers. Alive and magnified, they were creeping into my bedroom.

I did not hesitate or shrink this time. I sprang up, tense and defiant.

"No, you don't!" I yelled at them. As they seemed to hesitate before the impact of my wild voice, I charged frantically. For a moment I scattered them and got through the bedroom door, as on the previous night. There was another shindy in the entry; this time they all got hold of me, like a pack of hounds, and wrestled me back against the wall. I writhe even now when I think of the unearthly hardness of their little gripping paws. Two on each arm were spread-eagling me upon the plaster. The cruciform position again!

I swore, yelled and kicked. One of them was in the way of my foot. He floated back, unhurt. That was their strength and horror—their ability to go flabby and non-resistant under smashing, flattening blows. Something tickled my palm, pricked it. The point of a spike. . . .

"Miss Dolby!" I shrieked, as a child might call for its mother. "Help! Miss D——"

The door flew open; I must not have locked it. "Here I am," came her unafraid reply.

She was outlined against the rectangle of light from the hall. My assailants let go of me to dance toward her. She gasped but did not scream. I staggered along the wall, touched a light-switch, and the parlor just beyond us flared into visibility. Miss Dolby and I ran in to the lamp, rallying there as stone-age folk must have rallied at their fire to face the monsters of the night. I looked at her; she was still fully dressed, as I had left her, apparently had been sitting up. Her rouge made flat patches on her pale cheeks, but her eyes were level.

THIS time the dancers did not retreat or vanish; they lurked in the comparative gloom of the entry, jigging and trembling as if mustering their powers and resolutions for another rush at us.

"You see," I chattered out to her, "it wasn't a nightmare."

She spoke, not in reply, but as if to herself. "They have no faces," she whispered. "No faces!" In the half-light that was diffused upon them from our lamp they presented the featurelessness of so many huge gingerbread boys, covered with pink icing. One of them, some kind

of leader, pressed forward within the circle of the light. It daunted him a bit. He hesitated, but did not retreat.

From my center table Miss Dolby had picked up a bright paper-cutter. She poised it with the assurance of one who knows how to handle cutting instruments.

"When they come," she said steadily, "let's stand close together. We'll be harder to drag down that way."

I wanted to shout my admiration of her fearless front toward the dreadful beings, my thankfulness for her quick run to my rescue. All I could mumble was, "You're mighty brave."

She turned for a moment to look at the picture above my dying fire. My eyes followed hers. I think I expected to see a blank canvas — find that the painted dancers had vanished from it and had grown into the living ones. But they were still in the picture, and the cross and the victim were there, too. Miss Dolby read aloud the inscription:

"*A living picture* . . . The artist knew what he was talking about, after all."

"Couldn't a living picture be killed?" I wondered.

It sounded uncertain, and a childish quibble to boot, but Miss Dolby exclaimed triumphantly, as at an inspiration.

"Killed? Yes!" she shouted. She sprang at the picture, darting out with the paper-cutter. The point ripped into one of the central figures in the dancing semicircle.

All the crowd in the entry seemed to give a concerted throb, as of startled protest. I swung, heart racing, to front them again. What had happened? Something had changed, I saw. The intrepid leader had vanished. No, he had not drawn back into the group. He had vanished.

Miss Dolby, too, had seen. She struck again, gashed the painted representation of another dancer. And this time the vanishing happened before my eyes, a creature at the rear of the group went out of existence as suddenly and completely as though a light had blinked out.

The others, driven by their danger, rushed.

I met them, feet planted. I tried to embrace them all at once, went over backward under them. I struck, wrenched, tore. I think I even bit something grisly and bloodless, like fungoid tissue, but I refuse to remember for certain. One or two of the forms struggled past me and grappled Miss Dolby. I struggled to my feet and pulled them back from her. There were not so many swarming after me now. I fought hard before they got me down again. And Miss Dolby kept tearing and stabbing at the canvas—again, again. Clutches melted from my throat, my arms. There were only two dancers left. I flung them back and rose. Only one left. Then none.

They were gone, gone into nowhere.

"That did it," said Miss Dolby breathlessly.

She had pulled the picture down. It was only a frame now, with ragged ribbons of canvas dangling from it.

I snatched it out of her hands and threw it upon the coals of the fire.

"Look," I urged her joyfully. "It's burning! That's the end. Do you see?"

"Yes, I see," she answered slowly. "Some fiend-ridden artist—his evil genius brought it to life."

"The inscription is the literal truth, then?" I supplied.

"Truth no more." She bent to watch the burning. "As the painted figures were destroyed, their incarnations faded."

We said nothing further, but sat down together and gazed as the flames ate the last thread of fabric, the last splinter of wood. Finally we looked up again and smiled at each other.

All at once I knew that I loved her.

Here Lies

By H. W. GUERNSEY

An ironic little story about a practical communist who taught his friend when to take him seriously

CHAUNCEY knocked the dottle out of his corncob and briefly startled Old Shep by inquiring unemotionally, "Will you never finish that blasted stick?"

Which in Old Chauncey was tantamount to fury. Words being precious things, both old boys hoarded every syllable: Shep tightened his leathery lips and with the scalpel-point of the knife flicked away a mote of pine. Each link of the chain he was whittling from that interminable stick of soft pine resembled ivory in its satin finish. He might produce one link in a day or let it require a full week. No hurry. The current chain numbered four hundred and seventy-two links. A masterpiece.

Under Shep's surreptitious scrutiny, Old Chauncey stood erect purposefully and stalked to the woodpile. There a fat log stood on end. With one swift, seemingly effortless stroke of the ax he cleft the log in two, spat explosively and hiked into the house wagging his jaw.

The log-built house, a jewel of conscientious carpentry, stood on the wooded elevation called St. Paul's Hill, near town. On the side hill one hundred and twenty feet below stood another log-built affair, formerly the ice-house. Since Old Shep had become Chauncey's permanent guest, this structure had been equipped with furnishings as complete and comfortable as the house, including plumbing. So there was no reason for Shep to hang around Old Chauncey's kitchen.

The housekeeper, Celia Lilleoden, performed the chores incidental to both houses with such easy efficiency that old Chauncey was repeatedly reminded of his bachelorhood. From continually sunning themselves behind the kitchen like two old snakes the men had acquired a wrinkled black-walnut finish, but Celia still retained the firm, buxom ripeness of an apple.

As a practical communist Old Chauncey kept his latch-key out by inclination. His generosity was limitless.

Thus, Old Shep did not have to ask for anything he wanted. It was share and share alike.

For example, he charged tobacco to Old Chauncey's account at the store in town. He always had. If he preferred a grade of tobacco superior to what Old Chauncey himself used, such was his privilege. A plug is a plug.

Shep and Chauncey once had occupied the same double desk of raw cherrywood in the schoolhouse which was now a weedy hill of rubble and rotten wood a half-mile out on the backroad.

Besides words, Old Shep hoarded tobacco plugs in case the cause of communism ever collapsed.

In accordance with this scheme of living, Old Chauncey gradually became accustomed to being spared the nuisance of opening the occasional letter he received from another old soldier in Sackett's Harbor, New York. At first Shep had gone to the trouble of sneaking the mail down to the ice-house and steaming it open. But currently the mail arrived slit

open without any subterfuge. The knife, incidentally, was the better of Old Chauncey's two. Shep had borrowed it, knowing that in communism there can be no Indian giving.

On one occasion Chauncey accosted Old Shep behind the kitchen with a crumpled letter in his fingers.

"Shep," he suggested casually, "I wish you'd slit my letters open at the top instead of an end. It wouldn't bunch the writing up so much when you shove it back inside."

"Chauncey," Old Shep replied tremblingly, "you're not serious with me, are you? If you want to keep secrets from your old crony, why, you just tell me seriously not to open those letters any more and I won't."

It used to give Chauncey a funny feeling when Old Shep talked like that.

Of a somnolent summer morning while Chauncey was scrubbing his long yellow teeth he glimpsed blurred movement through the starched white bathroom curtain. Tweaking the curtain somewhat aside he witnessed Old Shep scampering down the side hill to the icehouse with a load of kindling in his arms.

"I'll be dog-goned," swore Old Chauncey with toothpaste foam dribbling down his chin. "He complains he can't do his chopping on account of his rheumatism, and look at the old turkey go! I see where I chop kindling for both of us from now on."

When Old Shep showed up to get in a few licks of whittling before breakfast, Chauncey inquired, "How's that rheumatism?"

"Fierce, Chauncey. I'm getting mighty creaky."

"Well, help yourself to my kindling, Shep. Long as I *know* where it's disappearing to, I don't give a durn."

"Thanks, Chauncey; thanks! I knew you'd feel that way."

The bacon, eggs, and delicately crusty fried potatoes hit the palate so ambrosially that, after breakfast, Chauncey was seduced into the disastrous error of mentioning to Shep the chances of marrying Miss Lilleoden: error, for it was only human nature to covet the goods which another man prized most.

Thenceforward Old Shep neglected his whittling or idled awkwardly with it in the kitchen, where a housekeeper spends most of her time. Chauncey observed blackly that Old Shep had a cunning way with him, too.

"Durn it," Chauncey ruminated dismally, "everything I want, he gets. If I tell him to stay away from her he won't take me seriously. The old hoodoo always has his way. Anyhow, his durned whittling is out of my sight."

Beffll a morning when Old Shep didn't appear, and Chauncey found him stretched out stiff half-way down the side hill. In Shep's vulturine right fist was clenched a small crumple of bills. This pilfering had occurred with such regularity that the companion of Chauncey's childhood had accumulated just about enough to get started with Celia Lilleoden.

Chauncey asked the coroner, a glistening little round man like a wet dumpling, "Is he dead?"

"Of course he's dead," said the coroner. "Obviously."

"He has no kin," Celia reminded Old Chauncey in her slow, soft contralto.

"I'll do him one more favor," Chauncey offered unblinkingly. "He can have my lot in the cemet'ry."

The lot in Dream Hill Cemetery measured eight feet long, five feet wide and ten feet deep, meaning that it had been excavated and ready for occupancy these past five years. The walls were common brick. On the floor was a stone bed to lie on. Whimsically Chauncey had also installed a small table furnished with a tobacco bag and pipe, matches, an alarm clock with an illuminated dial, and an ashtray. And a thick, plumber's candle. The old pagan!

Anchored in the foot-wall of this cell, ladder-like, were iron rungs which had enabled him on past occasions to descend and inspect his subterranean property; as, on this occasion, he made the trip to deposit Shep's unfinished wooden chain.

The stone slab sealing the cell had long been cut with the dangerous advertisement: HERE LIES CHAUNCEY D'AUTREVILLE WHOSE WORLDLY GOODS WERE ANY MAN'S FOR THE ASKING.

Naturally, a new inscription had to be chiseled.

"But there ain't any more room in that piece, Chauncey," the stone-cutter objected. "You want 'nother stone."

"Turn it upside down and cut it in the bottom," Old Chauncey directed. "With that topside staring him in the face, he'll have something to read in the hereafter."

The underside, becoming the face, carried the inscription: HERE LIES SHEPARD FRANKENFIELD WHO FEELS NO ANXIETY FOR THE FUTURE NOR REGRET FOR THE PAST.

On the day preceding Old Shep's interment, Old Chauncey paid a visit to the nearest justice of the peace with Celia Lilleoden and no one thought it was in the least peculiar. As Chauncey balanced accounts with himself, the state would otherwise inherit his property eventually, as was right, but he wished to insure Celia's staying on as his housekeeper, in which capacity she beggared superlatives.

While four huskies furnished by the undertaker replaced the granite sheet over the brick chamber, Old Chauncey recollected the particulars of a certain fit of Shep's, dating about five years before, shortly before Celia. That catalepsy, or whatever it was, had gripped Shep as though in death for nearly three days until Old Chauncey had thought of making a brassy rumpus next to his ear with the big dinner bell. The alarm clock in the subterranean mausoleum was set for eleven o'clock, terminating a like period of time, when Old Shep might be expected to wake up and yawn in the hereafter. Just a whim of Chauncey's, since the coroner had pronounced Old Shep indisputably defunct.

Late that night Celia surmised worriedly that her absent husband might be visiting the tomb of his lifelong crony, and there he was in the sickly forest of tombstones, hunkering down on Shep's horizontal tombstone like a boy watching a game of marbles.

But he was listening, not watching. He knocked again on the slab with his bony knuckles, cocked his head. Listening for the response while the lazy breeze lifted his silken gray hair in the starry cave of night, he asked, "Cele, do you hear him down there?"

Celia's gentle mind recoiled from the idea that the dead might rise in answer to a human summons. The stoically restrained grief for his departed friend must have touched her husband somewhat in the head.

On the fifth night Chauncey observed, "That Old Shep's ghost must be getting tuckered out."

Celia decided that there was a limit to indulgence.

"Chauncey," she ordered firmly, "you mustn't come down here any more. You'll be taking pneumonia."

He accepted the order without protest.

"Maybe *that*," he commented to the frankly puzzled Mrs. Old Chauncey, "will teach the old grasshopper when to take a man seriously."

The Last of Mrs. Debrugh

By H. SIVIA

Mr. DeBrugh was dead, but he still regarded his promise as a sacred duty to be carried out

"LETTY," Mr. DeBrugh remarked between long puffs on his meerschaum, "you've been a fine maid. You've served Mrs. DeBrugh and me for most of fifteen years. Now I haven't much more time in this life, and I want you to know that after Mrs. DeBrugh and I are gone, you will be well taken care of."

Letty stopped her dusting of the chairs in Mr. DeBrugh's oak-paneled study. She sighed and turned toward the man, who sat on a heavy sofa, puffing on his pipe and gazing across the room into nothingness.

"You mustn't talk that way, Mr. DeBrugh," she said. "You know you're a long time from the dark ways yet." She paused, and then went on dusting and talking again. "And me—humph—I've only done what any ordinary human would do to such a kind employer as you, sir. Especially after all you've done for me."

He didn't say anything, and she went on with her work. Of course she liked to work for him. She had adored the kindly old man since first she had met him in an agency fifteen years before. A person couldn't ask for a better master.

But there was the mistress, Mrs. DeBrugh! It was she who gave Letty cause for worry. What with her nagging tongue and her sharp rebukes, it was a wonder Letty had not quit long before.

She would have quit, too, but there had been the terrible sickness she had undergone and conquered with the aid of the ablest physicians Mr. DeBrugh could engage. She couldn't quit after that, no matter what misery Mrs. DeBrugh heaped on her. And so she went about her work at all hours, never tiring, always striving to please.

She left the study, closing the great door silently behind her, for old Mr. DeBrugh had sunk deeper into the sofa, into the realms of peaceful sleep, and she did not wish to disturb him.

"Letty!" came the shrill cry of Mrs. DeBrugh from down the hall. "Get these pictures and take them to the attic at once. And tell Mr. DeBrugh to come here."

Letty went for the pictures.

"Mr. DeBrugh is asleep," she said, explaining why she was not obeying the last command.

"Well, I'll soon fix that! Lazy old man! Sleeps all day with that smelly pipe

between his teeth. If he had an ounce of pep about him, he'd get out and work the flowers. Sleeps too much anyway. Not good for him."

She stamped out of the room and down the hall, and Letty heard her open the door of the study and scream at her husband.

"Hector DeBrugh! Wake up!"

There was a silence, during which Letty wondered what was going on. Then she heard the noisy clop-clop of Mrs. DeBrugh's slippers on the hardwood floor of the study, and she knew the woman was going to shake the daylights out of Mr. DeBrugh and frighten him into wakefulness. She could even imagine she heard Mrs. DeBrugh grasp the lapels of her husband's coat and shake him back and forth against the chair.

Then she heard the scream. It came quite abruptly from Mrs. DeBrugh in the study, and it frightened Letty out of her wits momentarily. After that there was the thud of a falling body and the clatter of an upset piece of furniture.

Letty hurried out of the room into the hall and through the open door of the study. She saw Mrs. DeBrugh slumped on the floor in a faint, and beside her an upset ash-tray. But her eyes did not linger on the woman, nor the tray. Instead, they focussed on the still form of Mr. DeBrugh in the sofa.

He was slumped down, his head twisted to one side and his mouth hanging open from the shaking Mrs. DeBrugh had given him. The meerschaum had slipped from between his teeth, and the cold ashes were scattered on his trousers.

Even then, before the sea of tears began to flow from her eyes, Letty knew the old man was dead. She knew what he had meant by the speech he had said to her only a few minutes before.

"His heart," was the comment of the doctor who arrived a short time later and pronounced the old man dead. "He had to go. Today, tomorrow. Soon."

After that, he put Mrs. DeBrugh to bed and turned to Letty.

"Mrs. DeBrugh is merely suffering from a slight shock. There is nothing more that I can do. When she awakens, see that she stays in bed. For the rest of the day."

He left then, and Letty felt a strange coldness about the place, something that had not been there while Mr. DeBrugh was alive.

She went downstairs and made several telephone calls which she knew would be necessary. Later, when Mrs. DeBrugh was feeling better, other arrangements could be made.

She straightened the furniture in the study, pushing the familiar sofa back in place, from where Mr. DeBrugh invariably moved it. Then she knocked the ashes from the meerschaum, wiped it off, and placed it carefully in the little glass cabinet on the wall where he always kept it.

Times would be different now, she knew. She remembered what he had said. "You will be well taken care of." But there had been something else. "After *Mrs. DeBrugh* and I are gone."

Letty could no longer hold back the tears. She fell into a chair and they poured forth.

But time always passes, and with it goes a healing balm for most all sorrows. First there was the funeral. Then came other arrangements. And there was the will, which Mrs. DeBrugh never mentioned.

His things would have fallen into decay but for the hands of Letty. Always her dust-cloth made his study immaculate. Always the sofa was in place and

the pipe, clean and shining, in the cabinet.

There was a different hardness about Mrs. DeBrugh. No longer was she content with driving Letty like a slave day in and day out. She became even more unbearable.

There were little things, like taking away her privilege of having Saturday afternoons off. And the occasional "forgetting" of Letty's weekly pay.

Once Letty thought of leaving during the night, of packing her few clothes and going for ever from the house. But that was foolish. There was no place to go, and she was getting too old for maid service.

Besides, hadn't Mr. DeBrugh said she would be taken care of. "After *Mrs. DeBrugh* and I are gone." Perhaps she would not live much longer.

And then one morning Mrs. DeBrugh called Letty in to talk with her. It was the hour Letty had been awaiting—and dreading.

There was a harsh, gloating tone in Mrs. DeBrugh's voice as she spoke. She was the master now. There was no Hector to think of.

"Letty," she said, "for some time now I have been considering closing the house. I'm lonely here. I intend to go to the city and live with my sister. So, you see, I shan't be needing you any longer. I'll be leaving within the next two days. I'm sorry."

Letty was speechless. She had expected something terrible, but not this. This wasn't so! Mrs. DeBrugh was lying! It was the will she was afraid of. Letty remembered Mr. DeBrugh's promise.

She did not complain, however. Her only words were, "I'll leave tomorrow."

That night she packed her things. She had no definite plans, but she hoped something would turn up.

SLEEP would not come easy, so Letty lay in bed and thought of old Mr. DeBrugh. She imagined he was before her in the room, reclining on the sofa, puffing long on the meerschaum. She even saw in fancy the curling wisps of gray smoke drifting upward, upward. . . .

It was sleep. Then, with a start, she was suddenly wide awake.

She had surely heard a scream. But no.

And then, as soft and as silent as the night wind, came the whisper: "Letty."

It drifted slowly off into silence, and a cool breeze crossed her brow. She suddenly felt wet with perspiration. She listened closely, but the whisper was not repeated.

Then, noiselessly, she got out of bed, stepped into slippers, and drew a robe about her. Just as silently she left her room and walked down the hall to Mrs. DeBrugh's bedroom.

She rapped softly on the door, fearing the wrath of the woman within at being awakened in the middle of the night. There was no answer, no sound from inside the room.

Letty hesitated, wondering what to do. And once more she felt that cool, death-like breeze, and heard the faintest of whispers, fainter even than the sighing of the night wind: "Letty."

She opened the door and switched on the light. Mrs. DeBrugh lay in the bed as in sleep, but Letty knew, as she had known about Mr. DeBrugh, that it was more than sleep.

She quickly called the doctor, and sometime much later he arrived, his eyes heavy from lack of sleep.

"Dead," he remarked, after looking at the body. "Probably had a shock. Fright, nightmare, or something her heart couldn't stand. I always thought she would have died first."

Letty walked slowly from the room,

down the stairs, still in her robe and slippers. The doctor followed and passed her, going through the door into the outside.

She walked, as though directed by some unseen force, into Mr. DeBrugh's study. She switched on a lamp beside the sofa on which he had always sat; and she noticed that it was moved slightly out of place.

There was something else about the room, some memory of old days. First she saw some sort of legal document on the table and wondered at its being there. The title said: *Last Will and Testament of Hector A. DeBrugh.* It was brief. She read it through and found that Mr. DeBrugh had spoken truthfully in his promise to her.

Beside the will on the table was another object, and she knew then what the "something else" in the room was.

The meerschaum! It lay there beside the document, and a thin spiral of grayish smoke rose upward from it toward the ceiling.

No longer did Letty wonder about anything.

To a Skull on My Bookshelf

By ELIZABETH VIRGINIA RAPLEE

O bony relic of forgotten days,
Which, from my bookshelf, dominates the room,
Your empty sockets, with sardonic gaze,
Follow me weirdly in the deepening gloom!
I often think, if sudden speech returned,
You might reveal that secret, grisly jest
You're grinning at—or tell me what you've learned
Of that dark realm to which we're all addressed.

By what rude hands were you exhumed, and why
Wrenched from your body in its earthy bed?
Who knows but such indignity will I
Receive at other hands, when I am dead,
And, strangely resurrected, may adorn
The wall or desk of one as yet unborn!

The Purple Cincture*

By H. THOMPSON RICH

IT WAS a day in midsummer, I remember. I had been tramping over the densely wooded and desolate hillside the greater part of the morning, getting with each mile farther and farther from the tawdry haunts of man and nearer and nearer the rugged heart of nature.

Finally (it must have been after noontime) I paused and made a light lunch of the sandwiches and cold coffee I had brought with me from town, sitting on the edge of a great slab of granite rock, swept clean and smooth by ages of winds and rains and snows.

All about me was a veritable garden of great projecting rocks, jagged and broken, flat and polished, needle-like, giant flowers of earth in a thousand different forms.

Here and there a short, dwarfed pine or spruce tree struggled for a footing amid its rocky friends, and the resistless undergrowth surged up through every crack and crevice, while energetic mosses and lichens clutched at the granite walls and crept bravely up. One had a feeling of awe, as if in the presence of elemental, eternal forces. Here, I thought, if anywhere, one might commune with the voiceless void.

Suddenly my eyes chanced to fall upon a fissure in the rock to the left, and I sprang up with a low exclamation. What I had beheld was to all appearance a human skeleton!

Advancing reluctantly, yet with that insistent inquisitiveness which surrounds the dead, I bent, and peered into the fissure. As I looked, a cry escaped me. The object I beheld was indeed a skeleton—but what a skeleton! The head, the left hand, and the foot were entirely missing, nor was there any sign of them at first sight.

Thoroughly fascinated by the morbid spectacle, I began a search for the missing members, and was finally rewarded by unearthing the head some twenty feet away, where it lay half buried in the soft loam of decayed vegetation and sifted chole. But a painstaking and minute hunt failed to reveal the missing hand and foot.

I was successful, however, in finding something immeasurably more important

* From WEIRD TALES for August, 1925.

—a manuscript. This I found by the side of the mangled skeleton.

It consisted of several pages of closely written material, in a small pocket notebook, which fact, in connection with the partial shelter afforded by the crevice where the body lay, doubtless accounts for its preservation through the years that have passed since its owner met his hideous fate.

PICKING up the notebook with nervous fingers, I opened it and turned the damp and musty pages through, reading it at first hastily, then slower and more carefully, then with a feverish concentration—as the awful significance of the words was riveted into my brain.

The writing was in a man's cramped, agitated hand, and I give it to you just as I read it, with the exception of the names and places, and a few paragraphs of vital scientific data—all but a few words at the very beginning and end, where the manuscript had been molded into illegibility by the gradual action of the weather. Here follows:

"——as strange. I had a sense of apprehension from the start, a vague, indescribable feeling of doubt, of dread, as if someone, something, were urging me out, away, into these sullen hills.

"I might have known. The law of retribution is as positive as the law of gravity. I know that now. Oh irony!

"But I was so sure. No one knew. No one could know. She, my wife, heart of all, until the end. And the neighbors, her friends, never. She had merely pined away. No one dreamed I had poisoned her. Even when she died, there was no thought of autopsy. She had long been failing. And had I not been most concerned? None in the little town of ———, but who sympathized with me. And I mourned. Oh, I mourned! So it was that she paid the price of her infamy. Ah, but revenge never was sweeter!

"And he? Oh, but I despised him—even as I had formerly admired him, even as I had once loved my wife—so I despised him. And despising him, I killed him—killed him, but with a poison far more subtle than that I had used to destroy my wife—killed him with a poison in effect so hideous, so harrowing, that I can scarcely think of it without sickening even as I write.

"The poison I inculcated into his veins was a germ poison—a disease I, a physician of no small repute, had discovered and bred—a disease I had found existed only in a particular and very rare species of virulent purple and orange-banded spider—the genus ——— [Here follow in the original manuscript seven paragraphs of elaborate scientific data, of no particular interest to the average reader, but of incalculable import to the scientific world. These paragraphs I have omitted from this account for very significant reasons, but I hold them open to scientific examination at any time, and as I have said before, I will welcome investigation by reputable scientists]—a disease which was responsible for the extreme rarity of this particular species.

"By careful investigation I was able to learn the exact manifestation and workings of the disease—which by their frightful ravages upon the system of the unfortunate victim fairly appalled me.

"By segregating and breeding diseased members of this particular species of spider, I was able to produce the disease in the young in its most virulent form. You can well imagine the care I used in handling these spiders, to prevent infection. Briefly, the symptoms were as follows: The spider about to be stricken apparently first experiences a peculiar numbness of the first left foreleg, to judge from its inability to use or move

the affected member. A day or so later the leg, which in a healthy condition is a dull brown, turns a pale, sickening shade of yellow, which deepens rapidly until it has taken on a flaming orange hue. Then, in a few hours, a deep, vicious-looking blue cincture, or band, appears just at the first joint of the affected member. This cincture rapidly deepens to purple, which seems somehow to sear its way into the flesh and through the bone, so that in a surprizingly short time the whole leg is severed at the joint where the cincture has been.

"The spider then appears to regain its normal condition of health, which it maintains for about a week; then once again the hideous disease manifests itself, this time in the left feeler, or antenna, which in turn becomes yellow, then orange, whereupon the same blue cincture appears and deepens to purple; then, in about the same period of time as in the case of the leg, the antenna drops off, seared as if by some hellish flame.

"Once again the spider appears to regain its health; then in about a week the whole *head* of the stricken insect turns slowly yellow, then orange; then the cincture appears—and as a last manifestation, the head is seared off in flaming agony—and the spider dies in horrible convulsions.

"That, briefly, is the process—as I was able to note after weeks and months of tireless research and observation.

"So what more perfect punishment for the man who stole from me my wife, while pretending to be my friend?

"LOVING her as I did, I had not the heart to kill her in this hideous way: so I put her to death with a painless and insidious poison.

"But for ——— I had no mercy. In fact I gloated as I worked over my vile and diseased spiders, breeding them together until I was convinced that I had the germs of the disease in its most virulent form. Even then I was not sure what their effect would be on a human being—but that much at least I must hazard.

"So having finally made all my preparations, I invited him to my house and placed one of the diseased spiders upon his forehead one night as he slept.

"It must have bitten him, for he awoke with a cry, and I had barely time to close his door and get back to my room before I heard him rise and turn on the light.

"Then he called me, and I came to him, burning with a fiendish satisfaction. 'Something has bitten me, horribly,' he said. 'I feel as if I were going to be ill.'

"I managed to reassure him by telling him that it was very likely nothing but one of our uncommonly large mosquitoes, and he returned to bed.

"But he did not sleep. All night I heard him moaning and tossing. And in the morning he was very pale.

" 'I do not know what is the matter with me,' he said, and I thought he looked at me queerly, 'but I feel as if a little rest would do me good. I feel choked. I think I will pack up my knapsack and go off to the hills for the week-end. Want to come?'

"I longed to go with him, to see the dread disease work, but I feared its deadly contagion, and was anxious to get him away before I myself became contaminated. So I said no—and he went.

"That was the last I ever saw of him—but once.

"HE WENT away, as he had promised, and he seemed apparently well—all except the curious little inflamed spot on his forehead, whose significance I knew so well.

"He went away—and he failed to

come back. Days passed, and there came no word from him. People began inquiring. It was odd that he should have left no address. His business suffered.

"Weeks went by—and no word. Search parties were sent out. The river was dragged. The morgues of near-by cities were searched. And all the while I laughed. For who would think of turning to those far-off hills?

"And yet, as the days went by, I found myself turning to them again—wondering, wondering, wondering. I grew nervous, agitated. I got so I couldn't sleep.

"Finally, on a day in late summer (it was the 8th of August—date I shall never forget!) I packed a few things and set off. In search of him? God knows. I tried to tell myself not—but at any rate I found myself strangely, magnetically drawn to those distant somber hills—and thither I went.

"It was one of those gorgeous mornings that only August can produce, and the exhilarating air would have lifted my spirits, but instead I walked along depressed, and the knapsack strapped to my shoulder served only to intensify the feeling.

"In spite of all I could do, I found my mind reverting to the hideous revenge I had wreaked on my wife and her lover, and for the first time repentance stole in upon me.

"I walked along slowly, and it was well toward noon before I left the beaten road and started at random off over the hills, following a narrow and little-used path.

"Progress now became doubly slow and painful, leading often up steep inclines and hard descents, with the aspect momentarily becoming more and more rugged, as I left the lower hills and climbed toward the mountain.

"By this time, however, I had got a kind of exhilaration sought in vain during the earlier hours of the morning, and climbed on and on, glad to free body and mind thus of the poison of brooding and lassitude. I would return to the town at night and take supper at one of the small inns that abounded thereabouts. This would give me some hours yet before I turned back. For the time being, the thought of searching for ——— was forgotten. I had freed my mind of him entirely.

"PRESENTLY the path I had been following branched, and the right half narrowed into an all but obliterated trail, leading up a laborious slope. Forcing my way over dry, snapping underbrush and under low-hanging spruce boughs, occasionally starting an indignant partridge from its hidden nest, often put to a wide detour to avoid some hazardous gully cut deep by centuries of spring and autumn freshets, I at last emerged upon a small, circular clearing, evidently the work of some lone woodchopper.

"Here I sat down, tired by the climb, and refreshed myself with a sandwich from my knapsack. Then I pushed on to the summit, pausing frequently to examine some uncommon species of insect life with which the hills abounded.

"So much was I enjoying myself and such scant notice of the time did I take, that sunset came upon me unawares and I found myself, with darkness settling in on all sides with a startling rapidity, still on the summit of the mountain, with a good three-mile descent before me. Indeed, the prospect was not altogether a cheering one and I reproached myself for my heedlessness. But I had found a species of spider for which I had searched in vain for months; so, somewhat reassured by its precious body in a pill-box in my pocket, I started down.

"In spite of my best speed, however, night shut in on me before I had made

one quarter of the return, leaving me to grope the rest of the way in utter darkness, with not even the light of a dim star to go by. Vague fear awoke within me, but I shielded my eyes and stumbled to the bottom, sliding, falling, clutching here and there at some projecting tree-limb to check my headlong descent. Finally, torn and disheveled and shaking, I emerged upon the clearing. Pausing only for breath, I plunged on into the dark. Fear was growing—growing—that peculiar fear of the dark which is the heritage of those who have taken human life.

"What was that? Something lay gleaming queerly ahead, with a dull phosphorescent glow. I stooped and picked it up—and flung it from me shuddering. It was the skeleton of a human foot!

"I groped on, my every heartbeat choking at my throat. Of a sudden I came forcefully against a barrier of rock. I tried to feel my way around it, to get beyond it, but could not. It seemed continuous, a solid wall that would not let me by. Had I fallen into a trap in the darkness? Terrified, I turned—and there lay something else gleaming with that same weird phosphorescent glow! Sick with terror and dread, half fearing what it might be, I sprang on it and picked it up—*picked it up*—the rotting hand of a human being! With a stifled gasp I flung it from me, reeled, tripped through some vines, and fell swooning.

"WHEN I came to myself, I struck a match and looked about me. Its feeble flame revealed a pair of damp, rocky walls, low and vaulted. I was in some sort of cavern.

"Later on I crept out, collected an armful of sticks, brought them back, and soon had a fire started. By its light I observed that the rear of the cave was still in darkness, and judging that it must extend back indefinitely. I gave my attention to my immediate surroundings—when with a shock I saw, directly in front of me, a granite slab. On it lay several loose sheets of manuscript, scrawled wildly on odd scraps of paper.

"With a prophetic dread I bent forward and gathered the loose sheets together. Holding them near the fire, I peered closer. Then I think a cry must have escaped me. The writing was in ———'s hand, curiously scrawled and scraggy, but still recognizable.

"So fate had brought me to my victim!

"For the rest, there is little more to say. I am doomed as I deserve, even as he was doomed. His words speak all that can be spoken. They follow:

APRIL 4TH—*I had meant to spend only the week-end in these hills, yet here I am, after two weeks—still here, and suffering the pains of hell. What has come over me I cannot imagine. And yet—can I not? I am not so sure! Perhaps—perhaps ——— has in some devilish way managed to poison me. He is insanely jealous. He thinks there was something between his wife and me. Verily I believe he harassed her to death on the subject. And, having thus brought her to her grave, he wishes to send me there.*

Perhaps he will succeed—if it is true, that in some fiendish way he has got some of his germs into my blood. That bite, at his house that evening. I am not so sure. It was a most unusual bite. It seemed upon the instant to sour all my blood.

And yet, if he accomplishes my death, how vain it will be—for as God is my witness I swear I never harmed his wife. We were the best of friends, nothing more. And she loved him with a wholeness, a passion that any but a man maddened by groundless jealousy must at once have seen.

How he has wrecked his life! A mind so brilliant—and yet, with her dead, a closed room.

However, I may be wrong. I will wait. By the symptoms I will know. I write this down, for I must do something.

APRIL 5TH—*It is he now, his hellish work. I am sure of it. Today my left leg, which for two weeks has felt positively numb, turned a sickening yellow, from the ankle down, which began at once to deepen, until it now flames orange. And oh! the pain is hellish! Yes, I am sure it is ———'s work. But I will still withhold judgment.*

APRIL 6TH—*Today a deep, virulent blue cincture has appeared just at the ankle of the affected leg. What a hellish contrast to the orange!*

It is ———. I am sure now. Oh, what a fiend!

APRIL 7TH—*The cincture has deepened to purple, and seems to cut into the very flesh. It seems sometimes as if the pain would drive me mad.*

APRIL 8TH—*My flaming foot dropped off tonight, seared at the ankle by the purple cincture, and I flung it outside the cave. I wonder. Perhaps I may yet live to return to the world. Ah, I will be avenged for this!*

MAY 23RD—*I am cursed, cursed! Today, just as I was beginning to believe the hellish thing had left me, it returned, this time in my left hand. Oh, I can see it all: tomorrow and the next day and the next, for just two weeks, my hand will be numb; then will come that frightful yellow; then the orange; then—then the purple cincture!*

Curse the man who discovered this hellish disease—and turned it into me! I could tear him limb from limb. Oh, I pray to return! I would go now, yet I fear my malady is of a vilely contagious nature. I have not the heart to menace a whole community, perhaps a whole nation, perhaps humanity itself—merely to avenge myself on one man.

JUNE 6TH—*I was right! This morning I awoke with my hand that death-yellow. Oh, it is too regular, too certain—too cruelly certain!*

JUNE 9TH—*Thank God! My hand is gone—out there where my foot went. It happened tonight. Perhaps I may yet return! Perhaps I may yet be avenged. I wonder.*

JULY 21ST—Doomed! *That fearful numbness again—this time in my head. I cannot think—I cannot write—I can scarcely breathe. Oh, the pain—the pain——*

"HERE it ended in a sputter of ink. Trembling in every limb, filled with a horror and anguish and remorse no man can know, spellbound by the awful tale those few sheets told, I sat there motionless.

"So I had been wrong. Oh, my jealousy, my insane jealousy! As I sat there, all desire of life suddenly left me, and I thrilled with joy at the remembrance of the hand and foot I had come upon, outside the cave. They were his. I had touched them. I was contaminated with the dread disease.

"What was that? I listened, straining every nerve. From the back of the cavern had come a sound.

"Five minutes passed—ten—fifteen (I was oblivious of time)—but it was not repeated. Slightly I relaxed my aching nerves and tried to think. Already I fancied I could feel the fearful poison of the diseased spider working in my veins.

"Suddenly the significance of that last

entry in ————'s diary burst upon me, and I sat shivering as under a sudden deluge of icy water. *'July 21st.'* Two weeks more would make it *August 5th*, and three days more would bring it to—*August 8th!*

" 'Great God!' I cried aloud, 'tonight is the night!'

" '*Yes, tonight is the night!*' echoed a sepulchral voice from the cavern's inner darkness.

"In an agony of dread I looked, and the blood within me paled to water at the sight that met my gaze. Something—*something with but a single hand and foot*—emerged from the shadows of the back of the cavern and began to come forward, leaning heavily upon a rough staff for support.

" 'Stay back—*stay back!* For the love of God!" I shrieked. But the terrible thing came on and on, and the awful eyes fastened themselves upon my person and suddenly recognized me—and it smiled a hideous smile.

"When it drew nearer, I could see that all above the shoulders flamed orange, while around the neck a livid purple cincture seemed actually to be searing its way into the flesh.

" 'This is your revenge,' it spoke. 'And this is mine,' raising the hellish stump of its mutilated left arm and panting heavily at me: 'My suffering is over—but yours is all to come. And to the bodily pains of hell will be added the mental tortures of hopeless remorse—knowing your wife was innocent. With that I curse you.'

"Even as it spoke, the eyes rolled out of sight behind horrible lids, the tongue protruded itself in flaming agony, and the whole head, suddenly severed at the neck, thudded upon the cavern floor.

"I came to my feet with a mad cry, that, shattering the silence beyond the deepest shadows, swelled up in a thousand echoes, from the wail of a soul in torment to the screech of a crucified demon. Then I rushed headlong out.

"For the rest——"

THE last page was illegible, as the first had been, worn and corroded by the slow action of years of decay.

I put the notebook slowly in my pocket and sat there thinking, sickened and awed by the astounding manuscript.

Again I went over to the skeleton there in the fissure. Now I understood why the hand and foot were missing, and why I had found the head many feet from the body.

There it lay, mute evidence that the retribution was complete.

After Two Nights of the Ear-Ache

By FRANCIS HARD

Most gentle Sleep! Two nights I wooed in vain;
Thou wouldst not come to banish racking pain:
For what is Sleep but Life in stone bound fast?
Oblivion of the Present, Future, Past.

THE letter from G. M. Wilson, printed below, makes an astonishing accusation against WEIRD TALES; astonishing because this magazine has often been blamed for a policy the exact opposite of that attributed to us by Mr. Wilson. He says, in effect, that our stories lack interest because the reader knows in advance that they will all end happily, the villain will be defeated and virtue will triumph no matter what odds are against such an ending. We recall that WEIRD TALES was once rebuked by one of the magazines for writers because of our publication of *The Seeds of Death* by David H. Keller (July, 1931). The story was called "immoral" because the hero was given over to a lingering death, and the villainess succeeded in her evil schemes. One of our interplanetary stories was criticized by some of our readers because the red-headed reporter, who had endeared himself to the readers, was killed on Mars and could not return to Earth with the rest of the space-traveling party. A glance at the August issue (which is on the stands as this is written) shows at least four stories that refute Mr. Wilson's accusation against us. In one of these (*The Will of the Dead* by Loretta Burrough) a scheming mother, who had dominated her son's life, wrought a hideous doom upon her innocent daughter-in-law; all of which makes a fascinating story but does not allow virtue to triumph. In another (*The Last Pharaoh* by Thomas P. Kelley), the lovable English girl and her brother had their bodies taken from them so that the Pharaoh and his paramour could acquire their healthy bodies on which to transplant their own heads—surely a defeat of all that is good; the evil deed is not undone either, even though destruction overtakes the guilty pair at the last. Most of our stories do end happily because that is the way the authors write them; but our readers can never know in advance whether the ending will be happy or otherwise. Mr. Wilson's letter follows.

Does Virtue Always Win?

G. M. Wilson, whose letter we have answered above, writes from Rosebank, New York: "I realize that this epistle is slated for immediate deposit in the nethermost depths of the wastebasket, but nevertheless I still am having the satisfaction of getting something off my chest that has been bothering me for some time. The point I am bringing up is, I suppose, one of the unmentionables of the 'pulps'. It is, to put it tersely: why must virtue always triumph? I read some years ago that a writer who wished to achieve success with your type of magazine must never let heroism be overcome by villainy. I see that your authors have taken this lesson to heart, or perhaps it is your editorial policy to accept only stories which follow this category. Now there is no doubt that your publication could be one of the best 'escape mechanisms' in the literary field; however, it becomes monotonous to an extreme after the first two issues. The remedy is simple: you need only to vary your menu slightly. Your authors display enough ingenuity and skill; your field, that of the uncanny, is interesting; in fact, you lack only the quality of variety to elevate your magazine far above the pulp class. Why not let the reader have some reasonable doubt as to whether the 'fair-haired boy' will conquer the nasty villain or monstrosity. As it is now, no one is ever in doubt as to the outcome. Our upright young American will win, no matter what the odds. It is similar to the old-time movie serials where the hero falls down a thousand-foot cliff at the end of part nine and comes up as strong as ever in part ten. It is true that

you publish stories of the extraordinary, but, God, it is too extraordinary to stomach having right win continually. It isn't life. You may say that you are not writing about life, that I can get my sordid realism in the contemporary fiction of the Hemingway school, but I think you can get my point. The point is that you have the makings of an excellent magazine; above the class of the usual pulp, yet you usually and deliberately tie yourself down with this one flaw. I suppose you are a success financially and have a large reading public, but don't you think you could widen your appeal and increase your circulation by adopting the above suggestion? No doubt I am wrong, for it is your business to know the psychology of your reading public; and yet I'm not so sure I'm wrong. I think there's something in all of us that delights in the exaltation of evil. I am no publicity hound, but I think if you were to publish this letter and ask for comments you would find that many of your readers would agree with me. In any event, if you could answer me personally and state your reasons for the exclusion of all stories in which the hero doesn't triumph, I should be grateful. Frankly, I am curious."

Save the Necronomicon!

Elaine McIntire, of Malden, Massachusetts, writes: "Madam Brundage certainly can draw, but she doesn't make her 'femmes' look scared. They are too beautiful. I liked Virgil Finlay's cover last month; hope he does more soon. That reminds me—is Mr. Ball going to give us more of Rald, prince of thieves? I sincerely wish he would. [Yes, you shall have more Rald stories.—THE EDITOR.] But! what in tarnation is *The Terrible Parchment?* Is our friend Wellman trying to put my pet book *Necronomicon* on the spot? Well, he'd better not try! I'm up in arms! I like to think that there is such a thing. It gives me something to think about coming home alone late at night along dark streets. What about it, readers? Are we going to let that pass? . . . For myself, I like nice, gray, werewolf stories. And the more murky, gory, and slinky a story is the better I like it."

Some Suggestions

Lawrence Miller, of Norfolk, Virginia, writes: "The stories in your magazine are all good. You have no kicks coming. But I have several suggestions that would tend to make the magazine perfect. The first: Why such a strict policy in your reprint department? As matters stand, WEIRD TALES readers are given only the shorter stories from your back issues. Weren't there some praiseworthy longer ones? Of course there is the old cry against long reprints—Authors must eat!—but you could easily circumvent that. When you plan to reprint a novelette, merely skip a reprint for one month and make up for it the second month. Or use smaller type. After all, the type in the Eyrie has not harmed my eyes. The second idea concerns those two great writers who died recently—Lovecraft and Howard. For a long time they carried the burden of writing WEIRD TALES largely between them, and the great majority of your readers has probably never seen either of them. How about pictures? A photograph of each carried inside your cover. Make good likenesses of them (they deserve it) and *have no writing on the picture!* If necessary, charge extra for that particular issue. Or skip the other illustrations. Or even skip the stories. But give us those photographs. I will close with an appreciation of Henry Kuttner. He is the most versatile artist to ever appear in WEIRD TALES. *The Jest of Droom Ai'ista* is every bit as good as *The Eater of Souls*, which up to last month was the best ever printed. He is one of the two really worthwhile weird poets. The other is—or was—Edgar Allan Poe. Let's have another as good as *Ragnarok.*"

Trudy Answers Our Critics

Gertrude Hemken, of Chicago, writes: "Comes my monthly gab-letter to aggervate and p'raps delight you. Fustest of all, I must express my complete and wholly satisfactory pleasure at *The Abyss Under the World*. Gracious me, I still feel as though I had been awakened from a strange and charming dream—particularly that tour along the spur with the chasm below—soundless and depthless—now I want to go back to sleep and continue that dream, only I know I must wait. Still there is a satisfaction that the story will be completed, whereas a real dream from which one awakens, seldomly is finished if an attempt is made to try that. (Gosh, that sounds garbled—but I trust you know what my object is.) Anyhow, I feel

(Please turn to page 506)

COMING NEXT MONTH

THE rivet-studded oaken door crashed open, splintering from the assault of pike-butts whose thunderous echoes still rolled around the walls of the tiny stone room revealed beyond the wreck of the shattered door. Jirel, the warrior-maid of Joiry, leaped in through the splintered ruins, dashing the red hair from her eyes, grinning with effort, gripping her two-edged sword. But in the ruin of the door she paused. The mail-clad men at her heels surged around her in the doorway like a wave of blue-bright steel, and then paused too, staring.

For Franga the warlock was kneeling in his chapel, and to see Franga on his knees was like watching the devil recite a paternoster. But it was no holy altar before which the wizard bent. The black stone of it bulked huge in this tiny, bare room echoing still with the thunder of battle, and in the split-second between the door's fall and Jirel's crashing entry through its ruins Franga had crouched in a last desperate effort at—at what?

His bony shoulders beneath their rich black robe heaved with frantic motion as he fingered the small jet bosses that girdled the altar's block. A slab in the side of it fell open abruptly as the wizard, realizing that his enemy was almost within sword's reach, whirled and crouched like a feral thing. Blazing light, cold and unearthly, streamed out from the gap in the altar.

"So that's where you've hidden it!" said Jirel with a savage softness.

Over his shoulder Franga snarled at her, pale lips writhing back from discolored teeth. Physically he was terrified of her, and his terror paralyzed him. She saw him hesitate, evidently torn between his desire to snatch into safety what was hidden in the altar and his panic fear of her sword that dripped blood upon the stones. . . .

You will not want to miss this utterly strange and thrilling novelette, in which Jirel and Northwest Smith join forces against the mighty evil powers of Franga the warlock. Two of the most popular writers of fantastic fiction have collaborated to make this story gripping and fascinating. It will be printed complete in next month's WEIRD TALES:

QUEST OF THE STARSTONE

By C. L. Moore and Henry Kuttner

——Also——

LIVING BUDDHESS

By SEABURY QUINN

A fascinating tale of a living female Buddha and the dreadful change that befell a lovely American girl—a tale of Jules de Grandin, and a dire lama from out of devil-ridden Asia.

DREAD SUMMONS

By PAUL ERNST

The old butler heard a scream, muffled by the street noises from outside, and when he investigated he found that a dread summons had been answered.

THE VOYAGE OF THE NEUTRALIA

By B. WALTIS

An exciting story of weird adventures and a strange voyage through space to other planets—by the author of "The Abysmal Horror" and other fascinating thrill-tales.

THE SECRET OF SEBEK

By ROBERT BLOCH

What grisly horror, spawned in prehistoric ages in ancient Egypt, stalked through that weird house in New Orleans? A tale of the Mardi Gras.

November Issue Weird Tales . . Out October 1

THE EYRIE

(Continued from page 504)

that Mr. Suter is just dandy—the sample is fine. Nextest, I orter do something about the finis of *The Last Pharaoh*—'twarn't bad atall atall—somehow I really didn't feel bad that lovely Carol and her dear brother were not restored to their original bodies, but, muh goo'ness sakes, warn't thet princess Atma the hungry gal? She had a bad bad case of the 'gimmies'—wess then some of our gold diggers. Nope, 'twarn't a bad story at that—I was wholly satisfied with it from the start. After all, the villain was defeated and that should be enough for any reader, sez I. Thank you, Mr. Kelley, for some mighty entertaining reading. . . . A very queer tale was this *Thing of Darkness*—I never heerd tell of quite such a ghost before. He really was a rotter, I must say. I liked the unusual note of the old Mrs. Burden's sacrificing herself that a ghost might be laid. Rather unusual form of exorcism—isn't it? *The Mandarin's Ear* was rather refreshing in its lightness—almost humorous in that the ear of another could hear all about its former possessor. Quite an idea that! Finlay's illustration is nice, too, although I can't say the beauty looks very Chinese. Eurasian more or less, with a strong inclination to the Russian. Loretta Burrough has something there. *The Will of the Dead* is a fine example of what some mothers would like to do to their sons' wives. Some mothers are intensely jealous of their sons. Don't say me nay—I know! This mother in the tale was a tyrant, no less. . . . And so Henry Kuttner tells us Dis is a city of iron! Sounds like bad pronunciation to me. Tsk tsk—HK. Yes sir, live and learn, live and learn, sez I—the old alchemists never learned to make precious metals of baser products, and those who succeeded—well, look at Droom Avista—as also King Midas. I just wonder if Mr. Wellman believes that his 'Necronomicon story to end all N stories' will really end them. Somehow I wish it would—I could never get myself to pronounce the word correctly and I'd have it wandering in my brain, popping into my thoughts at the most unweird times. Shall we wait and see if it really is the end of all N stories, Mr. W.? Now to the Eyrie—it's high time I start stepping on a few toes, and giving boosts to others. First an orchid to J. Z. Thompson who wrote from Glendale, California—I liked his catchy phrase—'pulse-pepping.' Mrs. H. L. Phillips of Quincy, Illinois, seems so very prosaic in her statement of the magazine being 'in general very interesting.' Mrs. P.—that sounds much too polite—why don't you whack down a real statement and say: 'I think it's just *the* bestest of all the bestest, and—well, it's just the nuts, no less.' Or don't you understand my language? I agree with Robert J. Hoyer of my own fair and windy city that Doctor Lamontaine is a fine character for a yarn—one of those rip-roaring topers—yet a he-man—and entirely lovable. We will have more of him, won't we? T. O. Mabbott is going to get a toe-trodding—perhaps it would be better for him to reread *Clicking Red Heels*—the young millionaire did have more than one pair of shoes, and the story ends that 'in every pair of his shoes were found these strange clicking devices'—the question I raised in regard to that was how the dooce anyone could get hold of all his shoes and insert those clickers. As for the question of the hollow appearing on the seat beside the young man in his roadster—well, don't you, my friend, have an imagination? Don't you know that when a person wants to and yet fears to, he will see what is not there? Such was the case with the young millionaire. Or perhaps Mr. Ernst can explain it better than I. That will be all this time—I am happy to see Seabury Quinn again for next month. I am also awaiting the meeting of Jirel and NWSmith quite anxiously."

A Threadbare Theme

Clifton Hall, of Los Angeles, writes: "Strangely enough, the thing that has caused me to break the ice and pen my first letter to the Eyrie is the fact that I find that your August issue falls short, in my estimation, of your usual high standard of excellence. The cover itself was the first thing to give me this impression. It seemed rather carelessly done. Then, too, where are all the pretty nudes that once made WT so attractive and readable? All of my WT-fan friends here in Los Angeles agree with me that the WT of two years ago was made far more entertaining by the well-done nudes that featured the cover and stories. There is *certainly* nothing pornographic about it; all

artists agree that a well-done nude is the highest form of artistic expression. And Finlay and Brundage—especially the former—seem capable of doing them well. But back to the magazine itself: I don't think I'm unfair to *Thing of Darkness*, the featured story, when I say that it has the oldest spooky-story plot on the face of the globe. Since the time of Charles Dickens—and where he got it I can't say—it has been used so many times in books, plays, short-stories, movies, radio dramas, etc., etc., that you could get out a magazine of twice the thickness of WT every week from now to 2000 A. D., and still not reprint more than half of them. This is the only one that really got my ire up, but there were several others that I thought rather mediocre. *The Abyss Under the World* seemed to be written more in the style of a pulp detective thriller than a real weird story; and perhaps I'm being a bit hasty, inasmuch as there is another installment to be printed, but isn't it a bit strange that the Egyptians under the ground should speak nothing but English? I thought *World of the Dark Dwellers* was pretty good, although the idea of mechanical masters who had once been men living underground and preying on the 'light dwellers' is strangely like H. G. Wells' *The Time Machine*. I enjoyed *The Mandarin's Ear*, *The Last Pharaoh*, and the Lovecraft reprint, though, and according to the 'trailer' of next month's issue, WT seems destined to return to its former high level. Here's hoping."

The Dead Masters

Reginald A. Pryke, of Kent, England, writes: "Since way back in 1925 we (that means three of us) have been your loyal followers and admirers. In the days of Senf's covers, monthly Jules de Grandins, Henry S. Whitehead and Dunwich Horrors, into Rankin's era with his clouded, evil, misty illustrations, bursting into Howard's pulsating epics, Depression days and bi-monthly issues—terrible time of famine—and so into the present day. *Per aspera ad astra!* You have a record to be proud of, a future to encourage you to even greater efforts, and a spirit to take the sad blows Fate has dealt you unflinchingly. A moment to think of The Fallen. Whitehead: Who

BACK COPIES

Because of the many requests for back issues of WEIRD TALES, the publishers do their best to keep a sufficient supply on hand to meet all demands. This magazine was established early in 1923 and there has been a steady drain on the supply of back copies ever since. At present, we have the following back numbers on hand for sale:

1932	1933	1934	1935	1936	1937
Jan.	....	Jan.	Jan.	Jan	Jan.
Feb.	....	Feb.	Feb.	Feb.	Feb.
....	....	Mar.	Mar.	Mar.	Mar.
....	....	Apr.	Apr.	Apr.	Apr.
....	....	May	May	May	May
June	....	June	June	June	June
....	July	July	July	July	July
Aug.	....	....	....	....	Aug.
....	....	Sept.	Sept.	Sept.	Sept.
....	....	Oct.	Oct.	Oct.	
....	Nov.	Nov.	Nov.	Nov.	
....	....	Dec.	Dec.	Dec.	

These back numbers contain many fascinating stories. If you are interested in obtaining any of the back copies on this list please hurry your order because we can not guarantee that the list will be as complete as it now is within the next 30 days. The price on all back issues is 25c per copy. Mail all orders to:

WEIRD TALES

840 N. Michigan Ave. Chicago, Illinois, U. S. A.

writes obi stories as *he* used to do? West Indies, Haiti, voodooism, witchcraft—nobody can match his flawless literary style and tingling terms. Arlton Eadie: The teller of ghost stories, *par excellence.* Howard: Howard the great, the incomparable, the master. Howard, whose tales were breathless sagas snatched vibrant with life from the mouths of the scalds of old. Howard, who lifted his characters out of the dust and decay of times long forgotten, breathed eager, lusting, laughing, fighting life into them, clapped swords in their fists, and sent them tramping the witch-haunted, battle-strewn roads; men, every one, revelling in life and its joys, wine, women and the mad exhilaration of combat. Howard is dead. Solomon Kane, King Kull, Conan the Barbarian who set a crown upon his black head and defied all this world and the next to deprive him of it. Three real literary achievements, three who will live now that he is gone and the hand writes no more. . . . Revive Conan? Never, never, never! No, the sagas are finished. There was a hint of finality about Howard's last Conan story, *Red Nails;* a knitting-up of loose strands, a rounding-off as if he somehow knew he was completing a task. In that story I thought Conan found at last his mate, his long-sought-for companion. Together they left that evil place; together (but only in our imaginations) let them travel on towards whatever lies ahead. Let each true lover of the great barbarian dream his own tales of battle, love and brooding witchcraft. Any other course savors of sacrilege. Read and read again what has been written, but let no other man try and wield that pen or gird on that sword. Bury them with him. He will sleep the quieter. And Lovecraft: Let the men who knew and loved him as a friend pen his obituary. I, who only knew him through his matchless pen, bid farewell to an artist who knew how to play upon man's sense of fear as Kreisler plays upon his violin. Those long, brooding, almost somnolent opening paragraphs of his, almost devoid of conversation—somehow, Lovecraft's pen seemed to falter when he attempted to put his words into a personal mouth—impersonality was his keynote. With a sense of nightmare, barely glimpsed, the reader's eye fled from paragraph to paragraph, almost chased or driven, until the grotesque climax was attained, the spell broken, the pursuit lifted, leaving him weakened yet strangely exhilarated. Fear, like fire, is cleansing. Whitehead, Eadie, Howard, Lovecraft. Each in his own field such an undisputed master that the loss seems unbearable. Each, of course, has his disciples. Robert Bloch, for instance, seems a fit proselyte of Lovecraft, who, with experience, may yet equal his master, but no disciple can fill the place of his teacher in the mind and heart of any who knew that teacher's genius. I'm afraid this letter has spun itself out to an immoderate length. I can only plead my faithful service of years as an excuse and draw it to a conclusion. . . . As to your authors, I have already spoken of Robert Bloch. His tales are real gems and should get even better as he gains experience. Good old Seabury Quinn, almost the last of the old brigade, wrote a real winner, *The Globe of Memories* I believe it was called. Jack Williamson usually shows perfect taste, but his last was downright pitiable. I never thought to read such a hodgepodge of vile villainy and putty make-up, 'orrible plotting and dastardly scheming in your magazine. That stuff does not belong in the aristocratic WEIRD TALES. Repeat not the offense. *The Last Pharaoh* reads well, is exceedingly and fluently written and promises a fine climax. And who is this Clifford Ball? His *Duar the Accursed* was a neat piece of craftsmanship, and should develop into a first-class series."

A First-rate Job

Donald A. Wollheim, of New York City, writes: "May I offer congratulations on your August issue which is a first-rate job? Lovecraft's yarn was one I had never read before; Kuttner's was a superb little fable; Frank Owen is a true master in his own right; *The Last Pharaoh* is thoroughly intriguing and worth while. Wellman's Necronomiconic is a honey. But it won't end *Necronomicon* tales. I, for one, want to see the Necro grow bigger and bigger. It was one of the factors contributing to the making of WT's vivid and unique personality."

The Terrible Parchment

Joseph Allen Ryan, of Cambridge, Maryland, writes: "Wellman's short, *The Terrible Parchment,* was especially interesting to me; for I believe I was on hand when the idea for the tale was born. Otto Binder, Julius Schwartz, Mort Weisinger and I (as usual, I was the small frog in the big

pond) were standing at the corner of West 48th Street and Broadway in New York City last summer, chewing the rag a bit before departing on our various ways. The conversation drifted to WEIRD TALES, and to H. P. Lovecraft and the *Necronomicon* in particular. Mort glanced at the near-by news stand and remarked: 'Suppose you went over to that stand and asked for a copy of the *Necronomicon*, and the fellow handed it to you. What would you do?' None of us knew exactly what course he would follow under the unusual circumstances. Otto remarked: 'Pay for it, I guess.' Mort digested this for a moment or so, then continued: 'That would make a good plot for a story—for some fan magazine, that is. You could explain that Lovecraft's readers had thought so much about the mythical *Necronomicon* that their combined thought-force materialized it.' As Weisinger knows Manly Wade Wellman quite well, it may be that the idea got around to the latter, who developed it into a short for WT. How about it, Manly?"

Cornish Scenery

I. O. Evans writes from Tadworth, in Surrey: "As one of your many British readers, I have greatly enjoyed the stories that appear in your excellent magazine, and I look forward to reading many more of them. I was, however, surprized to find a rather startling error in a story which appeared in a recent issue—I forget its name and that of the author, but it dealt with the worship of an Egyptian beast-god in a Cornish mine. [The story was *The Brood of Bubastis*, by Robert Bloch, in our March issue.—THE ED.] In this the author speaks of the 'Cornish countryside' as 'a region of mystic mountains, and purple peaks that towered above wild forest glens and green-grottoed swamplands.' I don't think any description could be less accurate! The highest hill in the duchy is Brown Willy, of only 1,368 feet; there are no forests—the bulk of the country is moorland; and the only 'peaks' are those of the hills of spoil from the numerous mine-workings, which can hardly be said to 'tower.' Later your author mentions local faith in 'leprechauns,' which are *Irish* fairies, and 'kelpies,' which are *Scottish!* The joke is that the scenery of Cornwall has eery qualities, and the people faith in spirits, which would have suited your author's story admirably had he got them right. What he

DIRECT from IRELAND

Wear a Shamrock, the greatest emblem of luck known.

Sterling Silver

Beautifully inlaid with green real enamel.

For pendant or pocket piece. A handsome novelty and souvenir direct from Ireland sent postpaid ANYWHERE for only (Coin or M. O.) **50c**

M. J. STAUNTON, 51a Dawson Street, Dublin, Irish Free State

GIRLS! Marry the man you want. Our book, "HOW TO WIN A HUSBAND," will show you how it's done. Price $1.00 postpaid.

MEN! WOMEN! Learn to be successful. Our book, "SUCCESSFUL BRAINS," will show you how it's done. Price $1.00 postpaid.

Both Books $1.75 postpaid.

MODERN SERVICE, 140 West 42nd St., New York

CIVIL SERVICE JOBS

are best. Don't miss exams. Be notified in time. Not a school. Write

McCORMACK, 1412-D Great Northern Bldg., Chicago

A Ghostly Voice from the Ether!

It was as if some phantom were whispering through the ether in the language of another planet. Read

"THE MOON TERROR"

(in book form)

PRICE—50c

CLASSIFIED ADVERTISEMENTS

SMALL ADS WORTH WATCHING

Authors' Service

MANUSCRIPTS WANTED. Books, Stories, Plays and Articles for placement in U. S. and foreign countries. Motion picture rights placed. Circular 1-1037 describing UNIFIED SALES PLAN free on request. OTIS ADELBERT KLINE, Authors' and Publishers' Representative, 470 W. 24th St., New York City.

Books

FOUR CLEVER BOOKS 15c each. "Will Rogers' Jokes and Wisecracks," "The Art of Dancing," "Knock, Knock Jokes," "Sophisticated Card Tricks," all four books 50c prepaid. Send for them now. Good Press, 820 Kinder St., Camden, N. J.

Business Opportunities

NEWSPAPER clippings pay. Write: Goodall Company, 742 Market St., San Francisco.

NEED MONEY. Practical opportunities for everybody. 3c stamp brings reply. Write today. Quality Products Co., P. O. Box 161, Hampton, Va.

Indian Relics

INDIAN RELICS. Beadwork, Coins, Stamps, Minerals, Books, Old West Photos, Weapons, Curios. Temple Mound Birdpoint 15c. Knife, ancient, 15c. Catalogue 5c. Indian Museum, Northbranch, Kansas.

was really thinking of I don't know; probably Scotland. Now supposing an English author, in a story, were to describe Rocky Mountain scenery in Florida or Louisiana bayous in Maine, would you be pleased? Our islands may be small, but their different regions have characters of their own."

Praise for The Carnal God

Max Armstrong, of Spokane, Washington, writes: "*The Carnal God*, written by John R. Speer and Carlisle Schnitzer, was truly a magnificent story, well written, and my choice for the best in the June issue. Second is the one written by Paul Ernst, *Clicking Red Heels*, a fascinating story, one that holds your interest to the end. The cover design by M. Brundage is a knockout!"

Random Notes by W. C., Jr.

"An acrostic sonnet, written in a sequestered Providence churchyard where Poe once walked." Thus was Adolphe de Castro's poem *Edgar Allan Poe* blurbed in the May issue of WEIRD TALES. But what was not announced was that seated beside de Castro as he composed the acrostic verse were H. P. Lovecraft and R. H. Barlow. . . . HPL, incidentally, was a sixth cousin of Barlow. . . . Jack Williamson, of Kansas, spent the month of June with his old friend Edmond Hamilton in Pennsylvania. . . . Robert Bloch left his beloved Milwaukee for a few weeks' stay with Henry Kuttner in Beverly Hills. C. L. Moore dropped in on them from Indianapolis, and Kuttner "had the pleasure of taking C. L. Moore for a ride on the roller coaster, and giving Jirel a new experience." . . . Kuttner's *Hydra*, soon to appear in WT, tells of the fate of Robert Ludwig (Bloch), who is imprisoned and mutilated in another dimension. In the original version, H. P. Lovecraft was another main character in the tale, hiding under the name Howard Phillips; but after his demise a revision obviously was necessary. Kuttner himself is in the story, presenting credentials under his brother's name. . . . Virgil Finlay, who has had an appreciable amount of work exhibited at the famed art center in Rochester, may illustrate the Derleth-Wandrei volume of Lovecraft's works. . . . I wish to retract a statement made last time to the effect that Earl Peirce, Jr.'s *The Surgery Master* had been rejected by Editor Wright and handed over to Bruce Bryan for a collaborative revision. The tale was not even submitted to WT until it had been reworked by the two young writers of Washington. It will appear under the title, *The White Rat*. . . . A convertible coupé overturned on Peirce recently in the Adirondacks, and he came out of it with his due of lacerations and bruises. If the windshield on the car had struck Peirce four inches lower he would have been beheaded. . . . *The Scarab*, proposed official organ of the Washington WEIRD TALES Club, will not see publication after all. . . . Clifford Ball's next Rald story is *The Goddess Awakes*, a 14,000-wonder. WT has also accepted Ball's *The Swine of Aeaea*, 13,000 words, built around the legend of Circe the Enchantress. This 29-year-old newest sensation of WEIRD TALES has led a life as adventurous as that of either of his two barbarian heroes. He went through high school in Millerstown, Pennsylvania, experiencing great difficulty with his mathematics and with a young and attractive school-teacher of whom he became enamored. After he had been graduated, he took a job in the license bureau of the State Highway Department. A few months later he began to hate the place, and left. The Miami catastrophe of 1927 occurred, and he and a friend trekked south to Florida, expecting to find heavy salaries waiting for eager workers. The state was "broke;" and tourists, alarmed by the tidal wave, were frightened away. Ball has slung hash, worked on dynamite crews as a capper, fry-cooked, run a dice table in a gambling-house, dug ditches, leveled auto springs, spread cloth in a shirt factory, and served beer in a Virginia tavern. This will always remain in Ball's memory, he says, as the best moments of his life.

Weird Tales of the Sea

Arthur L. Widner, Jr., writes from Waterbury, Vermont: "The July issue is one of the best to date. The cover is the most realistic-looking painting I have ever seen. Clifford Ball seems to have stepped into Robert E. Howard's shoes, but whether he will fill them is another question. So far he has not done too bad, but his feet will have to grow some before he can equal *The Devil in Iron*, *Black Canaan*, and other creepy tales. When I heard of Lovecraft's death it seemed as if I had been hit with some

sort of strange paralysis. I just couldn't realize that I would read no more of his faultless masterpieces or receive another letter in his small unusual hand. Yes, he even found time to write to an ordinary person like myself. No one can ever take his place. Stories as good as his may be written, but no one author can equal his string of A-1 weird tales. *The Outer Ope* was easily the best tale in the issue. I always liked sea horrors especially anyway. Graveyards, vampires and werewolves are fairly familiar, in fact they seem like old friends to me; but the sea, with its slimy slithery beings from the deep dark depths, always frightens me. In man's own element, land, most any fear can be borne, but the alien atmosphere of the water has two strikes on you to start with. *The Hounds of Tindalos* runs a close second, and is the best story I've yet read by Long. The angles and curves business was something new to me and heightened the interest quite a bit. *The Whistling Corpse* cops the yellow ribbon. It is reminiscent of Marion Crawford's *Upper Berth*. The living fog put in an eery touch."

A Satisfied English Reader

C. R. Forster, of Bardon Mill, Northumberland, writes: "It is almost exactly a year since I discovered my first WEIRD TALES, in an English book shop. I am a science-fiction fan, and it was with some doubt, and with unpleasant memories of various horror and terror magazines, that I started into it. But I liked that issue and subsequent ones so well that I started to get the magazine regularly from your English agent. WT is now my favorite magazine and I wouldn't miss an issue for anything. I was lucky enough to get hold of a few scattered back numbers for the years 1928-30. Although they contained many excellent stories, I believe that the magazine of today is an improvement over them, both in contents and appearance. This in itself was a pleasant surprise, for my experience with science-fiction magazines has been pretty much the opposite. My favorite authors are (or were) H. P. Lovecraft, Clark Ashton Smith, C. L. Moore, Robert E. Howard and Seabury Quinn. These five stood on a pinnacle above the rest, and the loss of Lovecraft and Howard is indeed a blow to fantasy-lovers. I hope you will reprint many of their best stories. Of Lovecraft, in particular, I could

NEXT MONTH

LIVING BUDDHESS

By SEABURY QUINN

A STRANGE and fascinating tale of a living female Buddha and the dreadful transformation of a lovely American girl in the ghoul-haunted city of Harrisonville, N. J. A curious tale of a dire Buddhist lama from out of devil-ridden Asia.

STRANGE indeed have been many of the adventures of Jules de Grandin, occultist-extraordinary and ghost-breaker-supreme, but never before has he encountered a situation more strange or more curious than in this enthralling story. The tale of the little French scientist's latest exploit will be printed complete

in the November issue of

WEIRD TALES

on sale October 1st

To avoid missing your copy, clip and mail this coupon today for SPECIAL SUBSCRIPTION OFFER. **(You Save 25c)**

WEIRD TALES
840 N. Michigan Ave.
Chicago, Ill., U. S. A.

Enclosed find $1.00, for which send me the next five issues of WEIRD TALES, to begin with the November issue. (Special offer void unless remittance is accompanied by coupon.)

Name .....

Address .....

City..... **State** .....

never tire. . . . Your covers in recent issues have been especially good. Virgil Finlay is even better on the cover than on inside work, and the competition seems to have aroused Mrs. Brundage to surpass her previous efforts, good though they were. From the above you will gather that you have at least one well-satisfied reader. May WEIRD TALES and yourself always prosper."

A Few Remarks

C. L. Leighton, of Chicago, writes: "Although I've read through every issue for the last 8 or 9 years, this is my first letter, though I sent a coupon, with remarks of enthusiastic admiration, when you printed *The Solitary Hunters.* (I still consider this your very finest over all the years.) The Eyrie is always interesring; probably like other WEIRD readers, I find myself looking each month for Miss Hemken's contribution. The varying and conflicting tastes of your readers (including my own) are amusing; Mr. Hoyer will likely laugh at my considering *Return to Earth* best for June, but I liked the careless, casual style in which Usru criticized our backward planet, still doping out idiotic wars. Like him I found *The Last Pharaoh* getting better, but Mr. Kelley copies from Doyle's Brigadier Gerard. . . . In every issue I find at least one story worth clipping out and saving; so I have accumulated quite a stock over the years. Among the best are Northwest's trip to Jupiter, and his encounter with the beauty filled with evil smoke; yet I can't get a kick out of Jirel of Joiry—how Mr. Moore will hook up 22nd Century Smith and Middle Ages Jirel, is something I rather look forward to. Of course I've preserved every Conan story—everything by the great master Howard. Noting Mr. Sivia's letter, I wonder if *Dnar the Accursed* might sometime succeed Conan in our hearts? (He ought to drop that Irish accent, though.) You will note I like to cover the past in my preferences—I find so much repetition regarding the last issue rather tiring. Mrs. Shover makes just criticism of hackneyed 'horror' words—one reason I admired *The Solitary Hunters,* written in careless up-to-date slang."

Concise Comments

Richard H. Jamison, of Valley Park, Missouri, writes: "With the two huge gaps so recently made in the ranks of WEIRD'S authors, it would be fine if a few of the old favorites could be coaxed into writing some more tales. How about writing some more like *The Space-Eaters,* Mr. Long? And what of the two Wandreis, H. Warner Munn, Mary E. Counselman, etc.? Aren't they writing weird tales any more?"

Ian C. Knox, of London, England, writes: "Congratulations on getting a substitute for Howard. I refer, of course, to Clifford Ball. I only hope he does not either get stereotyped or run short of ideas and dry up. His first two stories were excellent."

Robert Oberon, of Denmark, Maine, writes: "I had to write a line and tell you how well I liked *The Mandarin's Ear,* that swell story by Frank Owen in the August issue. Let us hear from Owen more often."

D. Rouse, of Elkins Park, Pennsylvania, writes: "I like the story, *Dnar the Accursed* by Clifford Ball, and would like some more stories by the same author. It is certainly weird, but good reading."

Charles Waldman, of Far Rockaway, New York, writes: "I have been reading your unusual magazine for several years now. Needless to say it has pleased me greatly. The magazine is truly unusual and out of the ordinary."

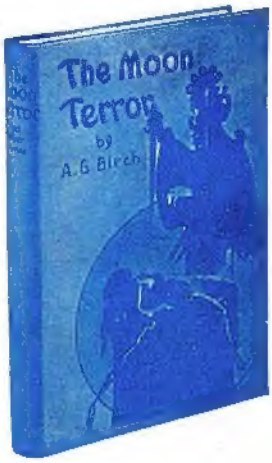
Bruce Bryan, of Washington, D. C., writes: "*The Statement of Randolph Carter,* in the current WT, is swell. I must've missed it when it first appeared. Second, I like *The Mandarin's Ear.* And *The Abyss Under the World* starts out well."

Fred John Walsen, of Denver, writes: "Congratulations upon your success in keeping the same high level for the WEIRD TALES stories, while the other publications sink lower and lower. It is a real treat to be able to read some of the true Poe type of fiction, and I trust that you will continue to publish in the same high standard."

Most Popular Story

Readers, what is your favorite story in this issue? Write a letter to the Eyrie, WEIRD TALES, and let us know your preferences. The most popular story in our August issue, as shown by your votes and letters, was the concluding installment of *The Last Pharaoh,* by Thomas P. Kelley. This was closely pressed for first honors by Frank Owen's charming Chinese fantasy, *The Mandarin's Ear.*

The Phantom of the Ether



The first warning of the stupendous cataclysm that befell the earth in the fourth decade of the Twentieth Century was recorded simultaneously in several parts of America. At twelve minutes past 3 o'clock a. m., during a lull in the night's aerial business, several of the larger stations of the Western hemisphere began picking up strange signals out of the ether. They were faint and ghostly, as if coming from a vast distance. As far as anyone could learn, the signals originated nowhere upon the earth. *It was as if some phantom were whispering through the ether in the language of another planet.*

A Mysterious Message from the Ether!

"To All Mankind:

"I am the dictator of human destiny. Through control of the earth's internal forces I am master of every existing thing. I can blot out all life—destroy the globe itself. It is my intention to abolish all present governments and make myself emperor of the earth.

"Communicate this to the various governments of the earth:

"As a preliminary to the establishment of my sole rule throughout the world, the following demands must be complied with:

"First All standing armies shall be disbanded, and every implement of warfare, of whatsoever nature, destroyed.

"Second: All war vessels shall be assembled—those of the Atlantic fleets midway between New York and Gibraltar, those of the Pacific fleets midway between San Francisco and Honolulu—and sunk.

"Third: One-half of all the monetary gold supply of the world shall be collected and turned over to my agents at places to be announced later.

"Fourth: At noon on the third day after the foregoing demands have been complied with, all existing governments shall resign and surrender their powers to my agents, who will be on hand to receive them.

"In my next communication I will fix the date for the fulfillment of these demands.

"The alternative is the destruction of the globe.

"KWO"

Thrills! Mystery! Excitement!—"THE MOON TERROR"

Who was this mysterious "KWO," and was his message actually a momentous declaration to the human race, or merely a hoax perpetrated by some person with an over-vivid imagination?

Newspapers and scientific journals began to speculate upon the matter, advancing all manner of theories to account for this strange summons. In Europe, as well as in America, vast throngs of excited people filled the streets in front of the newspaper offices, watching the bulletin boards for further developments. *Was this really the beginning of the dissolution of our planet?*

While the supply lasts, you can get a copy of this startling book at the *special close-out price* of only 50c. Send your order today to:

POPULAR FICTION PUBLISHING COMPANY,

840 N. Michigan Ave. **Chicago, Ill., U. S. A.**

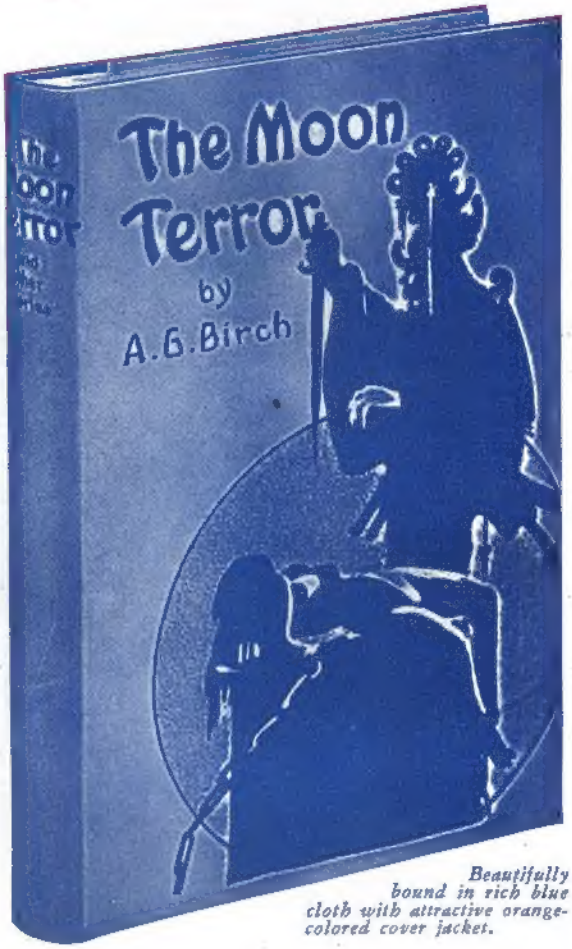
Special Bargain Offer

YOURS

While They Last

At Reduced Price

Only Fifty Cents



Beautifully bound in rich blue cloth with attractive orange-colored cover jacket.

THE MOON TERROR, by A. G. Birch, is a stupendous weird-scientific novel of Oriental intrigue to gain control of the world.

ALSO—OTHER STORIES

In addition to the full-length novel, this book also contains three shorter stories by well-known authors of thrilling weird-scientific fiction:

OOZE, by Anthony M. Rud, tells of a biologist who removed the growth limitations from an amœba, and the amazing catastrophe that ensued.

PENELOPE, by Vincent Starrett, is a fascinating tale of the star Penelope, and the fantastic thing that happened when the star was in perihelion.

AN ADVENTURE IN THE FOURTH DIMENSION, by Farnsworth Wright, is an uproarious skit on the four-dimensional theories of the mathematicians, and interplanetary stories in general.

LIMITED SUPPLY

Make sure of getting your copy now before the close-out supply is exhausted. Send your order today for this book at the *special bargain* price of only 50c.

NOTE: This book for sale from the publishers only. It cannot be purchased in any book store.

WEIRD TALES, Book Dept.
840 N. Michigan Ave., Chicago, Ill., U. S. A.

Enclosed find 50c for cloth-bound copy of THE MOON TERROR as per your special offer.

Name.....

Address.....

City.....State.....